Route Planning
Mapping Journeys to Priesthood in the Church of England

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ROUTE PLANNING: MAPPING JOURNEYS TO PRIESTHOOD IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

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ABSTRACT

Research suggests that the well-being of clergy in the Church of England is closely tied to the way that they feel about themselves, their vocation and their employer. Yet whilst successive studies have investigated the role of the Church in contemporary society, the impact of secularism and the professionalisation of the ordained ministry, little attention has been paid to the formation of new priests and the way in which this shapes their self-understanding and identity.

This longitudinal study follows men and women from their earliest days in theological training into their first parishes, asking what it is that they hope to be doing, what the Church appears to be training them to do, and what it is that they find expected of them after ordination. It questions whether new entrants to the profession have realistic models of what contemporary priestly ministry involves or whether they try to hold onto idealised, romantic visions of priesthood. In rapidly changing contexts and within an increasingly sceptical landscape, do they have the personal and institutional resources to grow and flourish? Do they find strategies to cope with the divergence between their hopes and the realities they experience, or does uncertainty about their role, and a divergence between the personal and the normative, lead to dissonance and alienation?

Utilising qualitative techniques and a variety of interdisciplinary approaches, semi-structured annual research interviews allow the investigation of critical incidents and experiences that prove crucial to the development or inhibition of a priestly identity. The thesis takes a chronological approach based on the metaphor of a journey, considering the images of priesthood that inspire vocations, examining the experiences of those training for ordained ministry, identifying the ways in which they attempt to integrate theory with practice, and discovering how the process has shaped their expectations and identities. It makes acknowledgement of the effects of the research process upon the researcher, and makes proposals to the Church for improved practice.

Introduction

Supposition

The Church of England continually needs new priests. Like any other large organisation, it has to replace staff who retire or resign, it has to meet the needs of its customer base (which as long as the parish system survives means being able to minister to everyone within a set geographical area, whether or not they consider themselves to be 'members' of the Church) and it has to plan for the future whilst hoping for expansion and growth. Yet *making* those priests – and I use the term very deliberately – is a process which attempts to bring together a number of seemingly divergent elements: the uncontrollable nature of God's involvement with the world; the desire of the Church to oversee and manage the behaviour and practice of its clergy whilst allowing them a degree of autonomy and independence unusual in secular employment; the wide variety of expressions of church practice and expression within Anglicanism; the varying abilities, skills and background of those called to ordained ministry; the historical fact of Establishment; the importance of the local; and the questioning of what it means to be a Christian in contemporary British society. Would-be priests are required to identify and prioritise the supernatural 'calling' of God but submit to the discernment and authority of the Church, and are commonly required to respond to the needs and wishes of their local communities and congregations whilst maintaining a clear institutional identity and obedience to those ordained

to Episcopal leadership. Anglican priesthood is at the same time deeply personal and irreducibly corporate; it is shaped by context but subject ultimately only to God. Little wonder that new entrants to the 'clerical profession' find themselves challenged by questions of authority, identity, ambiguity and practice.

The desire for ordination is, the Church believes, inspired not only by a hope to serve, but also by the supernatural intervention of God – which may manifest itself in fairly mundane ways[1] - in the form of a 'calling' or vocation to ministry. Priestly ministry in the Church of England traces its roots back to the faith established by the earliest followers of Jesus Christ, commissioned by him to 'make disciples of all nations'[2] (which itself built on the pre-Christian roots of Judaic temple worship), and points towards a God considered to be beyond the constraints of time and space, but manifested in a particular way by the life, death and resurrection of a first-century Palestinian man. As theologian Hans Küng points out, Christian faith relies upon the figure of Christ as its 'normative basis.'[3] A faith that is rooted in an individual person, in a specific context, must, in order to have significance beyond that time and place, demonstrate both a lasting resonance and an ability to engage creatively with contemporary life and issues. 'If God,' says David Ford, 'is conceived as related to all reality,' then it is necessary for Christian faith to 'engage intelligently' with the questions and

[1] David Martin refers to the 'friendly remark' of a friend that he could help the Church more concretely by being ordained than by critical academic comment. Foreword to Percy, 2006.
[2] *Matthew* 28:19, NRSV translation
[3] Küng, 1999 p.27

problems thrown up by daily existence.[4] The expression, understanding and leadership of that faith must remain congruent with tradition whilst remaining relevant to contemporary culture. Priesthood has therefore to be understood in terms of the past, present and future, and those trained and employed as priests must be able to interpret their role and function in ways that will make sense both to those looking at the tradition of the Church and the Christian faith, and to those questioning its relevance within twenty-first century English society. How the Church attempts to resolve this dichotomy, and the success with which it is achieved, is the theme of this study.

The process of becoming a priest is intentionally slow and demanding. Candidates for ordained ministry have to prove that they possess experience of church environments, demonstrate leadership and communication skills, pass a complex selection process and undertake a training course which typically takes two to three years. Their sense of vocation is repeatedly tested and their suitability for clerical service continually assessed. Even after satisfactory completion of all these stages, an occasion marked by a formal public ceremony (ordination), new clergy are expected to undertake a three to four year apprenticeship (a curacy) under the supervision of an experienced parish priest before being considered ready to apply for posts of 'first responsibility.' Producing new priests takes time and is costly for individual and institution alike. Yet whilst the process can help clergy to find ways of dealing with scrutiny and prepare for public ministry, it does not seem to address the issues of alienation

[4] Ford, 2002 p.722

that many men and women experience when trying to combine ecclesial and personal identities, structural and individual understandings, or institutional and congregational theologies. The professionalisation of clerical ministry has not helped to deal with the gap they perceive between the work they do, the value with which they are regarded by society, and their identities as priests and as representatives of the Church (in Marxist terms, the 'continuous struggle between capital and labour'[5]) and has left many clergy feeling alienated from the 'market' they serve. Others have sought to counter their sense of marginalisation by assuming clearly defined and authoritative clerical identities at the extremes of catholic or Evangelical practice. This can offer them certainties of belief and the support of other like-minded colleagues, but fails to address the underlying issues of what faith means, and how it is to be expressed and encouraged, in a rapidly-changing social and economic environment. Those who hold romantic or idealised visions of what priesthood involves are most likely to struggle to reconcile their hopes with the realities they experience. The majority of putative clergy will find ways of coping with the tensions raised by inconsistencies between their beliefs and their actions, but for some, the lack of congruence becomes unbearable.

As an ordained Anglican priest, I have a very personal interest in the expectations the Church of England has of its clergy, the support it offers to them, and the way in which a vocation to serve God and humanity is lived out

[5] Marx, 'Value, Price and Profit' at http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1865/value-price-profit/ch03.htm#c14 accessed 12 May 2012

through the medium of the Church. I find enormous fulfilment – most of the time - in my calling. Yet throughout training, during my curacy, and in my current role as chaplain to a diocesan bishop (a role that offers an unusually broad overview of clergy life and practice across a large diocese and beyond) I have been conscious of ordained men and women who find following their vocation to be painful, difficult and disturbing. In some (thankfully rare) cases, this results in stress, illness, the breakdown of relationships between priest and parish or priest and family, and, occasionally, misconduct. The resultant damage can be enormous. Is this, I wonder, an inevitable consequence of a role that is based upon an impossible exemplar (for no-one can hope to fully emulate Christ, who was both human and divine) who has, moreover, been theologically interpreted as the 'suffering servant,'[6] or does it reflect shortcomings in the way the Church selects and equips its priests for ministry? Are there things that could, or should, be done differently? And is the current model of priesthood espoused by the Church of England, a semi-mythological model that draws heavily upon the hopes and expectations of earlier generations, achievable and sustainable today?

Social psychology suggests that where there is 'cognitive dissonance' between actions and attitudes (that is, there is inconsistency between what someone thinks and does), individuals can become tense and uneasy. As a result, they either find strategies to lessen the tension, or they react inappropriately to situations which place them under pressure. Leon Festinger theorised that

[6] See *Isaiah* 53 and *Acts* 8

dissonance could be reduced by three (largely unconscious) approaches: changing a behaviour, changing the environment, or adding new information that reconciles or reduces the dissonance (social groups are important in both creating and reducing cognitive dissonance). He pointed out that the views of people seen as 'expert' or 'important' would be of increased significance to those suffering cognitive dissonance, and that whilst some dissonance is an inevitable consequence of making decisions, the importance of a decision will affect the way in which dissonance is experienced.[7] This has significant consequences for the ordained ministry; clergy can hold on to idealised notions of what priesthood involves whilst being required to act in a way which does not fit with their expectations; they work in physical and social environments which are often beyond their control; they have to operate in accordance with the wishes not only of their bishop (their 'father in God') but ultimately of Godself; and they are repeatedly asked to make decisions that relate, quite literally, to matters of life and death. The demands placed upon them, either externally or by their interpretation of their calling, make them particularly vulnerable to persistent dissonance.[8]

Successive researchers over the last ten years or so have pointed out the need for investigation into what the priesthood means to the clergy, and how they feel

[7] Festinger, 2001 pp.18-24, 177, 180, 37

[8] Slee has pointed out that (especially for women) the gap between religious expectation and real life can lead to both cognitive and existential dissonance and the 'compartmentalising' of religious experience. Slee, 2004 p.92

about the Church as 'employer.'[9] Yvonne Warren's investigation into clergy well-being noted that male clergy seemed more able to explore their identity as priests and individuals than their female counterparts, and that research was necessary into why the gap between priestly expectations (both individual and corporate) and reality left some people 'desperately sad.'[10] Helen Thorne's study of the first women ordained as priests in the Church of England raised questions about such matters as working arrangements, stipend, family life, clergy couples and marginalisation, yet despite her hopes that ordained women could be 'instigators of transformation,'[11] the same issues continue to occupy the minds of the Church and its clergy today. Davies and Guest discovered that 'embodied experience' of ministry seemed to be more significant than any amount of theory and training, describing this as 'an area ripe for further research,'[12] and Percy identified confused clergy shaped as much by a idealised vision of the past and the interest of the communications media as by any intentional action of the Church.[13] Questions being asked about the role and identity of the clergy by Towler and Coxon in 1979[14] are still being repeated by institution and individual alike.

[9] Although it could be argued that the ultimate responsibility is to God rather than to the Church, priesthood is expressed within and through the structures of a community of faith; in the terms of this study, the Church of England, which acts as *de facto* employer.
[10] Warren, 2002 pp39, 207
[11] Thorne, 2000 p.141
[12] Davies and Guest, 2007 p.42
[13] Percy, 2006 pp.7, 104
[14] Particularly 'uncertainty and ambiguity' about clergy roles. Towler and Coxon, 1979 p.34

The Christian life is often described in terms of a journey or pilgrimage[15] and the metaphor provides a framework for this study of the trajectory from vocation to ordination in the Church of England. My husband spent many years as a navigator in the Royal Air Force, and when we married, I discovered that getting an aircraft from A to B was not a straightforward process. Each journey was taken for a particular purpose: a training sortie, a planned operation, a response to an emergency situation. Factors such as the weight, speed, fuel capacity and endurance of the aircraft had to be set against distance, time, height and load. The route to be taken was calculated, taking into account geographical and man-made features that would influence the journey, and the weather forecast, including wind strength and direction, checked. Only when all these factors were in place was the track plotted onto a chart, and timings and headings entered, so that a plan could be shared with the remainder of the crew. Their combined skills, training and experience should enable a successful outcome, and ensure that appropriate actions would taken in the face of unexpected or unplanned events. The aircrew needed, in short, to know *what* was expected of them, *where* they were going, *why* they were undertaking the task, *when* and *how* it needed to be done, *whether* there were factors that were likely to influence progress, and *which* plans they had in reserve if things went wrong. Then they could clearly envisage the route they were to take and have the best chance possible of achieving their aim.

[15] Most famously by John Bunyan in *A Pilgrim's Progress*, but the metaphor of travelling with Christ towards God is commonplace in the gospels and spiritual literature.

Equally important to the planning that went into each sortie was the debriefing that took place afterwards. Log book entries, together with notes of any exceptional circumstances, allowed a cumulative record to be built up of tasks undertaken and expertise gained. If something had gone badly wrong, a professional team would investigate the particular circumstances, and an anonymous 'incident reporting' procedure ensured that individuals were not inhibited from passing on vital information through concern that it could affect their professional standing. A system of supervision remained in place throughout each individual's career, with detailed annual reports, refresher training and regular 'check rides' with an instructor ensuring that skills were both adequate for purpose and kept up-to-date. But perhaps as vital as the formal feedback were opportunities to share experiences within the peer group and to learn from one another's successes and mistakes. The familiar cinematic image of aircrew gesticulating wildly over pints of beer in the Mess bar, is rooted, like so many clichés, in truth; telling stories, sharing hard-won wisdom, letting go of tension and feeling part of a supportive community has always been crucial to analysing practice, sustaining enthusiasm and developing self-understanding. Cognitive dissonance theory suggests also that surrounding oneself with like-minded and similarly-thinking colleagues can be an important means of obtaining the affirmation from others that significantly reduces dissonance.[16]

[16] Festinger, 2001 p.208

Anglican clergy – jokes about 'sky pilots' aside - cannot, of course, be compared too closely to military aircrew.[17] Yet there are clear overlaps between elements of training and practice: representing the ethos and ethical stance of the employing institution; sacrificial living and service; the need for continual learning and reflection on purpose and practice; and the ability to act both independently and as part of a discrete group; come immediately to mind. But whilst one group's professional development is predicated on institutionally provided opportunities for peer-group learning and encouragement, the other's members are predominantly sent out as individuals, often isolated from their colleagues, and with core beliefs that can cause the seeking of advice or help to be (mis)interpreted as evidence of insufficient faith or a misheard vocation. Prayer may be crucial to the priestly existence, but it should not be expected to replace all other sources of support.

My contention is that, if they are to flourish, ordinands[18] and clergy need the same clarity of purpose, intention and action as the aircrew described above. In order to navigate their way from being committed lay members of the Church to becoming its ordained representatives, they need an accurate map of the terrain they are to cover, the skills to interpret it, an unambiguous aim, and sufficient resources to complete their task despite unexpected diversions. They must repeatedly assess where they are in relation to their route plan, checking way-points along their journey, in order to avoid becoming disorientated or lost. They

[17] Sociology has pointed out the way in which the Army 'represents an analogue of Christianity by combining fraternity with sacrifice.' Martin, 1997 p.150
[18] Those training for ordained ministry

also need to be able to debrief; to talk about their journeys in order to reflect on their own experiences, to develop new strategies, to learn from the findings of others who may already have travelled that route, and to receive their support and affirmation. If, as already noted, commentators have suggested that experience of priesthood is more influential than theory, then it is crucial that such experience is shared.

This project tells the stories of men and women journeying towards priesthood in the Church of England. Following them from their early weeks in training into their first parishes, I listen to their tales of exploration and navigation, and plot their routes towards what can sometimes be unexpected destinations. They are given voice, and encouraged to ask (following Wesley Carr) two fundamental questions: 'What is happening to me? And why?'[19] The study itself takes the form of a journey; it follows a chronological path through the exploration of vocation, the training process, ordination, curacy and beyond, investigating at each waypoint what individuals understand by what they discover and experience, and what that reveals about the attitudes and expectations held about priestly ministry by both Church and contemporary society. Chapter One examines categories of existing literature about priesthood, questioning if available texts provide adequate information or analysis about what it is to be an ordained minister today. Chapter Two discusses the methodological foundations of this study, describing its interdisciplinary foundations and the key structural foundations provided by feminist theory. Chapters Three, Four, Five,

[19] Percy and Lowe, 2004 p.196

Six and Seven journey with the participants in this study from theological college or course to curacies and posts of first responsibility, as they grapple with issues of identity, context and practice and attempt to discern whether what God and the Church appear to be asking of them bears any relation to their earlier expectations. The final chapter completes the map by presenting a summary of discoveries along the way and proposes additions to the route plan that could aid future travellers.

Today's clergy have been described as exhibiting 'a profound (if implicit) sense of bewilderment.'[20] Aware that the models of the past are no longer achievable (if they ever were) and that many contemporary texts about priesthood reflect idealism rather than reality,[21] they struggle to balance mythologised identities against their lived experience and attempt to maintain a sense of infinite possibility in the face of the limited reality of the present. Marxist literary critic Terry Eagleton has written about the 'vertiginous collapse of meaning'[22] that he finds in the Book of Jonah, and the way in which current political and social conditions create the desire to address issues of identity whilst simultaneously undermining any fixed sense of self-understanding. We long to bring about change, but are too uncertain of who we are or where we stand, suggests Eagleton, to have the courage to act. For clergy, ambiguity about their identity and status can be both painful and disabling. Priesthood is more than ministry: it implies a state of being as well as the performance of particular tasks; yet the

[20] Percy, 2006 p.7
[21] The following chapter will look in detail at literature about priesthood.
[22] Terry Eagleton, 'J L Austin and the Book of Jonah' in Jobling *et al*, Oxford, 2001

increasing professionalisation of ordained ministry in a fast-changing and sceptical world leaves clergy bereft and bewildered. Their routes towards priesthood reveal the perilous nature of the journey.

Chapter 1

Investigation

Categories of literature

Despite the proliferation of literature about spiritual matters and faith, there are relatively few texts about the development and practice of Anglican priesthood that are considered to be both contemporary and authoritative. In part this reflects ambivalence towards being too prescriptive as vocations are not only called into being by God, but are also understood continually to be shaped by divine inspiration in the form of the Holy Spirit as well as by the dictates of the Church. The Church may repeat what has become over time to be accepted as doctrinal truth, or tell the stories of historical developments, but is reluctant to instruct individuals - who understand themselves to be vowed to following what God asks of them - in what they should think, how they should live, and what it is that they should do. This, however understandable, is profoundly unhelpful to those investigating their vocations and to men and women who try to live out their vocation as priests. Anglican priesthood only makes sense within the community and structures of the Church.[23] If the Church itself finds that rapid changes in society and the attitude towards organised religion mean that it is unsure how to write convincingly about the principles that underpin priesthood,

[23] The essential character of priesthood is lifelong, but the exercise of that priesthood in the Church of England requires a community within which to minister and participation in a complex hierarchical and legal framework.

then it is impossible for the men and women it ordains to feel adequately prepared, resourced, or encouraged.

Texts about priesthood tend to fall into three major groups. There are some – although fewer than one might expect – books written by bishops (who are considered by virtue of their calling to have particular insight into what it is to be a parish priest) or senior clergy about the theological and practical elements of priesthood. Although these texts attempt to give a generic or doctrinal viewpoint, authors often base their understandings upon representative personal experiences or pastoral situations. Foremost amongst these books remains the collection of ordination addresses written by former Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, *The Christian Priest Today.* Although originally published in 1972 and containing material dating back considerably earlier, a survey of respondents to this research project found that many Directors of Ordinands[24] routinely continue to recommend this book to those pursuing a vocation to ordained ministry. More recent versions of this type of text have been written by the current Bishop of Oxford, John Pritchard, and ordained academics Christopher Cocksworth[25] and Rosalind Brown. I identify these texts as **Ideal Lives.**

[24] Diocesan Directors of Ordinands (DDOs) are responsible for overseeing the discernment of vocations and nurturing those who believe they have a vocation to ordained priesthood towards a Bishops Advisory Panel, which selects people for ministerial training. DDOs also oversee progress through training and work with bishops to find suitable training posts (curacies) for those who are to be ordained.

[25] At the time of authorship, Principal of Ridley Hall, Cambridge; now Bishop of Coventry.

Another group of books tell autobiographical stories of priesthood, often to illustrate the experiences of a discrete group, such as Christina Rees' *Voices of this Calling*, which reflects on the first ten years of women's priestly ministry. Other authors present biographical illustrations of clerics through the ages, often concentrating on those with particularly sacrificial or eccentric ministries.[26] Such texts, although very accessible, rarely draw conclusions from the material presented, preferring to let individuals' stories stand without comment. I refer to these texts as **Personal Stories.**

Then there are the books which take a more traditionally academic approach, investigating ecclesiological, psychological, pastoral, ethical, historical and theological aspects of priesthood. Some texts, such as Andrew Irvine's *Between Two Worlds: Understanding and Managing Clergy Stress*, focus on clergy as the principal subject; others, like Callum Brown's *The Death of Christian Britain* discuss aspects of ministry whilst advancing a theory of rapid secularisation. Aimed at a firmly academic or specialist readership, they are often polemic in tone, and demonstrate a clear desire either to advance a particular thesis, or to initiate changes in structures or practices. I call these **Investigative Texts.**

The three categories of literature described above form the background against which contemporary understandings of priesthood in the Church of England are measured. It might be expected that the 'ideal lives' models put forward by

[26] Michael Hinton, *The Anglican Parochial Clergy*

senior ‘successful’ clergy (which are routinely recommended by DDOs and training institutions) and the ‘personal stories’ which provide entertaining and easily accessible visions of lived ministries are given greatest weight, but as subsequent research will show, such texts do not prove as influential to ordinands and newly-ordained clergy as their ubiquity suggests. Instead, the ‘investigative texts’ exploring academic responses to certain aspects of priestly existence, are used to analyse the expectations and experiences of respondents to this project. More important still is a further category of literature, which although not directly concerned with ordained ministry, allows critical engagement with the often unspoken assumptions that underlie the expectations and responses of individuals and institution alike: that of feminist theory and theology.

Although this study investigates the journeys towards priesthood of both men and women, personal interest and belief that issues of gender, power and authority are of enormous significance in formation and experience, means that feminist theory and the work of feminist theologians underpins the project.[27] Feminist theology is considered to be a respected part of the academy in the United States (Schneiders comments that ‘in good schools of theology no student today will graduate without having read some of these [feminist] scholars and grasped both the competence they share with their male

[27] There is insufficient scope in this project to attempt to take into consideration the insights of – amongst others – womanist, lesbian or mujerista theologians, although I pay tribute to their courage in revealing the often unspoken assumptions about class, race, sexuality and colour that inform much of our theology and practice.

counterparts and the distinctiveness of their contributions'),[28] but it is rare for British theological departments or ministerial training institutions to consider it as anything other than a minority interest, leaving theology students and ordinands with 'little formal knowledge' of feminist concepts or approaches.[29] I will discuss the implications of this in later chapters, but draw attention now to the work of theologians such as Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Rosemary Radford Ruether, who over twenty years ago drew attention to the androcentric nature of church history and tradition,[30] Nicola Slee, whose book *Women's Faith Development* recognises that women's engagement with faith is personal, individual and relational, and Ellen Clark-King, who gives voice in *Theology by Heart* to the theological understandings and insights of 'working class women who are regular churchgoers.'[31]

Feminist theory shapes my methodology, as described in the following chapter, with adherence to an interdisciplinary approach (as advocated by Peter Middleton and Serene Jones) and concern to accurately, sensitively and ethically report the understandings and experiences of the research group. There has been considerable recent feminist engagement with autobiographical writings and anthropological studies (by writers as diverse as philosopher Toril Moi, anthropologist Ruth Behar, and psychotherapist Elisabeth Young-Bruehl); their insights into issues of power, 'truth' and subjectivity form a framework

[28] Sandra M Schneiders, 2004 p.xiii
[29] Slee, 2003 p.ix
[30] In, respectively, the classic texts *In Memory of Her* and *Sexism and God-Talk*
[31] Clark-King, 2004 p.1

within which to critically examine the stories told by women and men called to be priests in the Church of England. They also remind me that, as the 'location' of the researcher will influence how material is gathered and interpreted, and the conclusions that will be drawn, it is important to be open about my own faith story and my understandings of priesthood and priestly formation.[32] I imagine these works of feminist theory and feminist theology to be **Boundary Markers.**

Ideal Lives

Possibly the most idealised view of priesthood, and certainly the most iconic, is George Herbert's *A Priest to the Temple.* Published in 1652, twenty years after the author's death from tuberculosis (a death probably exacerbated by overwork), the text has haunted generations of rural ministers who inwardly bewail their failure to measure up to Herbert's exhortations that their thoughts should be 'full of making the best of the day,'[33] their routine should be structured around prayer, pastoral visiting and religious instruction, their homes models of Christian piety, and their Churchwardens fully cognisant of the Canons. Little wonder that a report in *The Guardian* was headlined 'Why George Herbert must die,' arguing that Herbert's celebrated text has given rise to the 'worshipping of a fantasy pastor, an impossible and inaccurate role model, a cause of guilt and

[32] 'Researchers' understandings are…as culturally specific as those of the researched.' Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, 'Method, methodology and epistemology in feminist research processes' in Stanley, 1990 p.23
[33] Herbert, 2003 p.18

anxiety.'[34] Nevertheless, the respect with which Herbert's short book has been viewed over the centuries is in no small part due to the recognition that its author, however inexperienced and idealistic (he had ministered in his rural parish for only two years before his death) was motivated by genuine care for his parishioners, a deep love of God, and enormous gratitude for his calling. We can respect the dedication and godliness of Herbert's life, and learn from that, but the model of priesthood that the text offers is too firmly located in the past to be considered relevant to contemporary experience. The fact that it still holds such a grasp on the priestly imagination is due largely to the fact that there has been little of quality to supplant it.

The desire similarly to model a Godly, devoted and prayerful life can be traced through many subsequent texts on priesthood, including the most influential in more modern times, Ramsey's *The Christian Priest Today.* It is immediately clear that the main body of the text is rooted in an earlier age, Ramsey himself acknowledging, in the revised edition the need for 'reflection on things contemporary'[35] (referring to such issues as psychological disturbances, ecumenism and reduced numbers of vocations), whilst frequently quoting in Latin and Greek and basing his text firmly upon classical Anglican theology and doctrine, the *Book of Common Prayer* and the Authorised Version of the Bible. His theology remains resolutely androcentric; although mentioning the need 'to

[34] Justin Lewis-Anthony, 'Why George Herbert must die' in *The Guardian*, 2 June 2009.
[35] Ramsey, 1985 p.ix

preach the gospel to men and women' the person to be converted is described as

> a man, a creature in God's own image: he is a husband, a father, an uncle, a neighbour, an employer or a manager or a workman, a citizen.[36]

These are the reflections of a bishop looking back on a long and successful ministry, but as the dedication of the text makes clear, they were written for the benefit of priests ordained between the years of 1952 and 1974. The truths they tell may be timeless, but the guidance they offer seems to reflect a more certain age.

Ramsey privileges the self-giving of Christ, the importance of the sacraments, the faithfulness of God and the power of the Resurrection above any contemporaneous reflections upon priesthood or society. The fact that *The Christian Priest Today* is not 'The Christian Priest of 1972' (or the revisited priest of 1985, or of 1928, the year of Ramsey's ordination) means that the text retains a power to move and inspire that other books, more grounded in their specific time and place, have lost. Nothing dates quite so rapidly as contextual theology. The essential truths that lie at the heart of Christian belief and undergird the religious vocation remain the same despite the different settings in which they might be expressed. However, Ramsey's gentle exhortations to those about to be ordained, though spiritually profound, present an idealised overview of what priesthood *should* be. His is an ontological perception of the ordained ministry, where the individual is changed and shaped by the presence of the Holy Spirit to

[36] Ramsey, 1985 p.36

'reflect the priesthood of Christ and to serve the priesthood of the people of God, and to be one of the means of grace whereby God enables the Church to be the Church.'[37] Those with a more functional view of priesthood will be left asking, 'yes, but how, at a practical level, do I do it?'

Similar approaches are found in more recent texts by Christopher Cocksworth and Rosalind Brown (2002), Kenneth Mason (2002), Alistair Redfern (1999), Stephen Platten (2007) and Stephen Croft (1999). Cocksworth and Brown's chapter headings ('Being for God', 'Being for Holiness' etc) reflect the ontological foundation of their understanding of ministry, and their text tends towards the scripturally-focused, meditative, culturally detached examination of priesthood typified by Ramsey. It is significant that both Ramsey and Herbert are quoted at length[38] in the text; significant too that the conclusion sets vocation in the context of Anglican and scriptural tradition: 'we hope that this book has helped to set the living of this calling in a wider context of God's calling of people over the centuries,'[39] rather than in terms of contemporary experience.

Priests in a People's Church, edited by George Guiver, presents in contrast a collection of essays investigating priesthood 'in the context of the people of God.'[40] Firmly Catholic in approach (a significant number of contributors taught at The College of the Resurrection, Mirfield) and drawing on the monastic

[37] Ramsey, 1985 p.111
[38] Cocksworth and Brown, 2002 p.83 and pp.120-121
[39] Cocksworth and Brown, 2002 p.203
[40] Guiver, 2001 p.vii

tradition, the text is insistent that despite shared convictions, a simple model of priesthood cannot hope to reflect the complexities of modern life and understandings. Priesthood, the authors argue, has to be both a response to, and a reflection of, the society and the Church it serves. This can be clearly seen in the chapter headings: 'the priest in the media age,' 'marriage, priesthood and ministry,' 'the priest, sex and society' and so on. To be a priest in the Christian Church – and although this is a book considering an Anglican and English perspective, it looks beyond narrow denominational borders – is to journey with the whole company of the baptised, and to learn from the tripartite and fluid relationship between people, priest and God.

Guiver's text is an appealing mixture of reflection, illustration and contextualisation. Unlike Ramsey, there are always contemporary examples of testing situations with which to examine doctrine and theology. Where Ramsey discusses counselling in terms of Prayer Book liturgies of confession and absolution, the Cross, and the Psalms, *Priests in a People's Church* tells stories of contemporary victimhood and societal failings, quotes from René Girard and the desert fathers, and the nature of the incarnation. There are no simple responses to the situations it describes, but there are provocative and testing insights into how priesthood requires participation in, and at the same time detachment from, the realities of worldly life. Although the text would probably not satisfy an evangelical reader who gives priority to scriptural interpretation – there are remarkably few direct references to Biblical passages in any of the

essays – I found this to be a humane and inspiring book. The priest described by Guiver and his colleagues is given some strategies to cope with the many demands of ministry, whilst being reminded of the privilege of vocation and the ever-present grace of God.

Inspired, perhaps, by Ramsey's text, and by the responsibilities of leadership implicit in their Episcopal role, are books written about priesthood by serving bishops. One of the most recent is John Pritchard's *The Life and Work of a Priest*, which attempts to investigate different aspects of 'the principles and practices of a priest's life and work.'[41] There is a clear and acknowledged debt to Robert Martineau's book *The Office and Work of a Priest*[42] and reference to Ramsey's *The Christian Priest Today*, but unlike Ramsey's measured and detached prose, this is a work which places the author's individual response to the call of God at the heart of his understanding of priestly ministry. So a chapter investigating the importance of prayer to priesthood gives examples not only of scriptural and devotional texts, but also stories of real events (based largely on Pritchard's own experiences): the priest so exhausted by a busy and successful parish that his spiritual resources had run dry; the cathedral ministry structured around the daily offices; the early years of 'a twitchy spirituality'[43] that ignored the need for silence and reflection.

[41] Pritchard, 2007p.x
[42] Published 1972
[43] Pritchard, 2007 p.25

Whether or not *The Life and Work of a Priest* speaks effectively to the individual depends, because of reliance on personal as well as representative material, on how closely the reader can identify with the author. There is certainly a breadth of material and recognition of the needs and preoccupations of contemporary society, but the very detail in which every aspect of priesthood is examined, and the refusal to compromise any aspects of a God-given vocation, can result in an exhausting and bewildering list of requirements that few could hope to sustain. If 'the call to holiness'[44] involves excellence in prayer *and* preaching *and* leading worship *and* apologetics *and* theology *and*…then there is little space for human weakness, no matter how much reliance is placed upon the grace and gifts of God. To Pritchard's credit, he does acknowledge the criticism of others that 'the picture of the priest that emerges from the book is a bit too busy and breathless,'[45] but it is clear that his own ministry is founded upon self-giving dedication to the task of ministry to the people of God, and it is this pattern of the relentless pursuit of holiness that is modelled to others as both admirable and essential.

Other bishops have also written about their understandings of priesthood. Stephen Platten, Bishop of Wakefield, states in *Vocation: Singing the Lord's Song* that 'the essence of priesthood is in *being there* with people'[46] (one might ask how 'being there' as a priest differs from being a social worker or a lay youth leader) and like Ramsey and his successors, presents a vision of Christian

[44] Pritchard, 2007 p.7
[45] Pritchard, 2007 p.xi
[46] Platten, 2007 p.57

ministry that stands back from too close an engagement with secular culture. Similarly Alastair Redfern writes in *Ministry and Priesthood* (1999) that 'for Christians, 'ministry' involves giving clearer focus and expression to the life-giving grace of God in creation, and in this sense it is 'priestly', participating in the mystery of Christ, his living, dying and rising again.'[47] The focus once more is on tradition and the 'ideal' vision rather than on giving guidance to those considering their own formation as Anglican priests.

Books written by bishops, of course, tend to bear greater weight than those written by the laity or by humble parish priests. Although one can argue that Episcopal leadership is as much a vocational calling as any other form of Christian discipleship, the fact that the Church of England operates a clearly hierarchical structure means that bishops are thought of as 'successful' practitioners as well as experienced clergy. They have been rewarded by high office, and their pronouncements are largely regarded – at least by the faithful – with due deference and respect. Yet upon election to the episcopate, they are removed from parish settings (some might already have been in other leadership roles such as that of archdeacon or principal of a theological college for some years) and asked to focus on the wider mission of the Church rather than the realities of life as an overburdened parish priest. However much they attempt to provide an informed overview, they are detached from the very situations they wish to analyse. They are also, of necessity, written by men, and

[47] Redfern, 1999 p.11

so will not speak directly to the female experience.[48] Texts written by bishops might well describe how to be a priest who wishes to become a bishop, or how to be the sort of priest of whom the bishop wishes he has oversight, but they do not always provide relevant, realistic or helpful models of ordained ministry.

Other writers attempt to be more prescriptive in their approach. David Ison's *The Vicar's Guide: Life and ministry in the parish,* presents essays by a variety of contributors that address particular aspects of contemporary parish life and the way in which they impact upon the individual priest. The tone of this text is kept deliberately accessible, and the combination of theological reflection and practical approaches is appealing, but the advice given can sometimes appear simplistic or trite: 'If we don't learn and change, then our ministry – and the gospel we have to share – will be seen as increasingly old-fashioned and irrelevant.'[49] *What They <u>Don't</u> Teach You At Theological College: a practical guide to life in the ministry* by Malcolm Grundy presents a lively and humorous look at the Church of England. Its appeal is also its weakness, as in order to remain readable and easy to understand, there is little discussion of how particular pastoral or practical situations might have arisen, or how the interplay between God, priest and people might influence and shape the way in which faith and priesthood is expressed. For Grundy and his readers, there is an assumption that the local church is as it is, that parishes need priests (and archdeacons and bishops), and that the Church of England and its priests are

[48] Bishops such as Katherine Jefferts Schori and Penny Jamieson have written out of their experiences in the wider Anglican Communion.
[49] David Ison, 'Continuing Training' in Ison, 2005 p.10

'part of the fabric of society.'[50] It's a book to be picked up and referred to in moments of uncertainty, but it is not a text that will help the ordinand or the ordained to internalise and develop a priestly identity. Grundy's ministers come ready-formed.

Texts presenting the 'ideal lives' model of priesthood can offer a potent combination of theological reflection and images of Godly living, but there is a danger that they can leave readers feeling disappointed and unfulfilled. Because they tend to be based upon a Catholic understanding (concentrating mainly on priesthood and sacrament rather than leadership and scripture) they will not necessarily speak to the more Evangelical audience,[51] and if their illustrations of what priesthood should be do not resonate with the reader, they are likely to produce feelings of anxiety and inadequacy rather than inspiration. This is, to an extent, unavoidable as priesthood is a calling which asks individuals to follow Christ as an example; every dedicated priest is likely to be very conscious of the failure to match up to the divine image (there are additional issues for women, if they focus on the maleness rather than the humanity of Jesus). Whether they offer a doctrinally-based view of the ordained ministry, or whether they attempt to reflect priesthood in a contemporary context, they risk overburdening a group of people already prone to self-criticism and

[50] Grundy, 2003 p.vii

[51] Evangelical texts, suspicious of 'priestly' language, often concentrate on the leadership skills necessary to manage large congregations, or on scripturally-based approaches to specific ethical and societal situations. There is a gap in the market, I feel, for a good text on the meaning (rather than the exercise) of ordained ministry that would speak to Evangelical understandings.

introspection: Savage and Boyd-Macmillan note a common 'sense of frustration and failure' amongst clergy, and identify the danger that this can easily swing over to a compensating sense of self-importance,[52] and Towler and Coxon identified 30 years ago that public 'uncertainty and ambiguity' about the role of the priest – an uncertainty that has certainly not lessened over the intervening decades – led to a similar sense of bewilderment in the clergy.[53] Such texts can be helpful if they are *sought out* by priests hoping to explore and expand their personal understanding of vocation, or by interested 'outsiders,' but the way in which certain texts, particularly Ramsey's book, attain 'classic' status gives them a power to influence others that is out of proportion to the original purpose of the author. To recommend these books as definitive rather than representative texts can endanger the spiritual and emotional well-being of any who are uncertain of their calling or self-critical about their performance.

Personal Stories

The ordained ministry might be beyond the experience of many, but it holds an enduring fascination. The tabloid press loves a 'naughty vicar' story, especially when it can be linked to issues current in the public consciousness (the *Daily Mail* managed, in a story based on innuendo and conjecture, to link in one headline, to a popular television programme and four of its favourite issues: marriage, homosexuality, 'unfeminine' behaviour and the ordination of

[52] Savage and Boyd-Macmillan, 2007 p.134
[53] Towler and Coxon, 1979 p.34

women).[54] This is doubtless partly because the Anglican clergy have been such dominant figures in the English landscape for centuries, and as representatives of an established church (at least whilst bishops still sit in the House of Lords) still hold more influence over legal process and moral decision-making than would be suggested by the numbers of British citizens who describe themselves as active members of the Church. In part it is because the clergy, as moral arbiters and authority figures are expected to live the types of lives they recommend to others, and in part it is because the lives of those who dedicate themselves whole-heartedly to a particular enterprise or way of life are fascinating, whether they are sportsmen or women, entertainers, adventurers or religious practitioners. We want to know what their lives are like, what they have given up in order to achieve success in their field, and what inspires and motivates them. If they are completely different from us, we marvel; if we hope to follow in similar paths, we learn from their stories.

Contemporary popular culture eschews intellectual investigation in favour of the consumption of lived experience; the immediacy of auto/biographical narratives gives them a sense of honesty and reality that is not necessarily present in academic social analysis. Individual lives are considered representative of wider communities,[55] television's *Big Brother* turns the minutiae of daily life into entertainment and so-called 'misery memoirs' frequently top non-fiction bestseller lists. The irony, of course, is that the popularity of 'reality' television

[54] 'Vicar of Dibley, her broken marriage, and the gossip over a gay affair with the bull breeder in a Stetson.' The *Daily Mail*, 6 June 2009
[55] Smith and Watson, 1996 p.5

shows and particular types of autobiography may encourage subsequent forms of the genre to live up to the created demand; *Big Brother* contestants know that success depends upon their behaviour being sufficiently entertaining or compelling to ensure their winning the weekly vote to remain in the house, and each account of an abusive childhood must outdo its predecessors in intimately-described horror and deprivation if it is to engage and titillate a jaded readership. Autobiography, although appearing to be honest and self-critical, can be subjective and difficult to verify. As Rita Felski has pointed out, modern autobiographies might focus on details of personal experience, but the demarcation between autobiography and fiction is difficult to control.[56]

Auto/biographical lives of the ordained clergy, however, usually fill another purpose; they act as acceptable practical guidelines on how to sustain a life as a priest. Whilst postmodernism has taught us to be suspicious of narratives that purport to tell us what we *should* be doing, we accept more easily the implicit guidance offered by descriptions of recently-lived experience. Rose Hudson-Wilkin's candid account of how she responded to the casual racism she found in her first parish:

> I said, 'You and anyone else who is unhappy with me either because I am black or because I am a woman, you are free to go. I have just arrived here, I have no intention of leaving immediately, and I am very happy with myself both as a woman and a black person.''[57]

[56] Felski, 1989 p.87
[57] Rose Hudson-Wilkin, 'Beautifully and Wonderfully Made,' in Barr, 2001 p.213

has an encouraging ring of authenticity and self-awareness, whilst being grounded in a particular and identifiable context. The representative nature of her experience as a black woman experiencing racism and sexism in a Christian environment is able to engage readers, drawing them into an internal dialogue that, through the intimacy of shared confidences of a confessional nature, encourages the development of a sense of community based upon understanding and human fallibility.

Auto/biographical texts about priesthood have in recent years focused predominantly on female experience. This may be a result of autobiography being seen as a particularly female form, particularly when it deals with the more domestic details of everyday life, or as a response to the upheaval in the Church of England caused by the ordination of women to the priesthood. (Although this remains a critical issue, with continuing discussions over the consecration of women to the episcopate, it remains to be seen if another recent preoccupation, the place of lesbian and gay clergy within the Church, eventually produces a similar body of autobiographical material.)[58] In time for the tenth anniversary of the ordination of women, two collections of autobiographical stories were produced, Liz and Andrew Barr's *Jobs for the Boys?* and Christina Rees' *Voices of this Calling.* Both books encouraged ordained women to tell the stories of their journeys to priesthood, and their experiences during their first years of priestly ministry, but whilst Liz and Andrew Barr identified themselves as

[58] Of course, the vulnerability of those who expose their sexuality at a time when to do so could result in disciplinary action or ostracisation, means that autobiographical stories are currently only told by those who hide their identity or who have felt forced to leave the Church.

'witnesses, but not experts'[59] to the struggle for the ordination of women, Christina Rees, as Chair of pressure group Women and the Church (WATCH) had a more overtly pro-women agenda and a greater desire to set the stories in their historical and political context. Both texts aimed to be both readable and accessible to those without specialised knowledge of either the Church or its legislative process.

Jobs for the Boys? consists of reported interviews with twelve women who had been ordained priest, each chosen (although this is not made explicit) to reflect the variety of ministries served by female priests, and the different types of women called to priesthood. These 'extraordinary women' tell their stories in order to give insight into what the journey towards, and the experience of priesthood is 'from the inside.'[60] Their stories are told, simply and without artifice, following a chronological progression from family of origin and childhood to ordination and priesthood. The stories do not come to neat conclusions, as the majority of women interviewed were still, at the time of writing, in active ministry, and they do not, despite the underlying desire of the authors to demonstrate that women are able to become competent and sensitive priests, appear to follow a particular agenda. They simply record individual experiences, giving the reader the opportunity to take away from the encounter a greater understanding of what ordained life is like in particular places for particular people.

[59] Barr, 2001 p.vi
[60] Barr, 2001 p.viii

As the stories told by each woman are quite long, effectively forming a self-contained chapter and giving a potted life-history, it is easy to feel that a relationship has been initiated between reader and subject. The fact that the stories appear to be honest and revealing, acknowledging frailties and failings, gives them added verisimilitude, and their tones of determined humility act to counter any potential accusations of frivolity or ambition. However, as Toril Moi has suggested, whilst autobiographical writing can appear to make the subject vulnerable, it is possible that it can also be a *performance* that acts to build a mythological framework around the individual.[61] The fact that each woman was interviewed and the interviews transcribed for the book means that a process of editing and selection has taken place,[62] whilst the implicit lack of probing questioning by the interviewer allows the interviewees version of events to stand unchallenged. The use of the autobiographical form suggests directness and honesty, but allows what Smith and Watson call the 'assertion of agency;'[63] by telling her story, the subject is taking control of how her life is understood and given meaning. Autobiography is a narration about the past from the future; narrators are free to omit certain events, to shape the way in which the story is interpreted, and to demonstrate that they have learned from their experiences.[64]

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[61] Moi, 1999 p.163

[62] This process has been described as 'the embedding of the speech act in an institutional framework.' Marie-Françoise Chanfrault-Duchet, 'Textualisation of the self and gender identity in the life-story' in Cosset, Lury and Summerfield, 2000 p.62

[63] Smith and Watson, 1996 p.14

[64] Warhol and Michie's investigation of narratives of recovery from addiction refer to them as 'conversion narratives' which 'reinterpret the past in the light of a more enlightened present identity.' Robyn R Warhol and Helena Michie, 'Twelve-Step Teleology: Narratives of Recovery / Recovery as Narrative' in Smith and Watson, 1996 p.330

The combination of autobiographical narration and edited interview makes for a complex and culturally-marked text that is by no means as simple as it appears.

The personal can be fascinating, but is it relevant? Significantly, none of the priests interviewed in detail by the Barrs hold senior positions in the Church, giving the impression that life-stories are relevant only when there is no 'greater' story – that of a successful career – to give structure and order to the personal narrative.[65] The stories in the main body of the text give something of an insight into, for example, how one becomes selected by the RAF to become a chaplain, or how a married couple negotiated their way through difficulties caused by their very different individual understandings of priesthood, but the highly subjective nature of the material makes it almost impossible to draw genuinely representative conclusions from their experiences.[66] The reader is left uncertain if the text is providing insight or entertainment.

Voices of this Calling is, at first glance, a very similar volume, giving voice to a variety of women in different settings in order to encourage understanding of the impact of the first ten years of women's priestly ministry. There are, however,

[65] Women's autobiography has been criticised as being 'fragmented, episodic and repetitive, lacking the unifying linear structure imposed upon a life by the pursuit of a public career.' Felski, 1989 p.86

[66] An almost identical approach can be found in Isabel Losada's book *New Habits*, which tells the stories of ten women who became nuns in order to counter 'widespread ignorance of the Religious Life' and to 'overturn some of the myths.' (Losada, 1999 p.7) Like the Barrs' book, it is an eminently readable text, but its refusal to interpret the narratives offered by its interviewees leaves the reader uncertain of the author's motives.

some significant differences. The text is edited by Christina Rees, who as the former Chair of WATCH and a long-standing lay member of General Synod, has both theoretical and practical understanding of the issues facing supporters of women's ordination. Rees sets her stories firmly in the context of a continuing struggle towards the full inclusion of ordained women within church structures, rescindment of the Act of Synod,[67] and the ordination of women to the episcopate without qualification on the basis of gender. An initial chapter gives a brief overview of the historical situation that led up to the 1992 vote, discusses some ways in which the treatment of women by the Church mirrors issues faced by women in other professions, and reflects theologically on the implications of current patterns of behaviour. It is clear from the outset that this text is intended to inform and educate as well as to entertain, and the preponderance of high-profile and academic figures (including Penny Jamieson, Bishop of Dunedin, and the Archbishop of Canterbury) amongst its pages gives weight to its thesis. This is a book that hopes to initiate and sustain lasting change.

The form of the narrative is more self-consciously literary, and although each person's story contains some autobiographical elements, these on the whole are restricted to the development of the individuals' Christian faith and their vocation, and their experiences leading up to and after their ordination as priest. Each contributor is encouraged to reflect upon the meaning of their experiences,

[67] The Act that enshrines in law the right of parishes to reject the ministry of women on no grounds other than gender, and to ask for 'alternative Episcopal oversight' if their bishop ordains women.

and to be explicit about their theological understandings. There is a clarity of intention in the text; this is not simply the apparently artless recitation of life stories, but carefully reasoned and thoughtful analysis bolstered by the witness of lived experience in order to bring about transformation.[68] Gulnar Francis-Dehqani's description of the birth of her son, for example, leads into discussion about the integration of priesthood with personal identity, and the way in which new models of ministry can appear to be positive or threatening developments for the Church.[69] This is a book that thoughtfully analyses the way in which the personal, to adapt the old feminist slogan, becomes priestly as well as political.

These two texts are not of course the only examples of auto/biographical writings about faith and ministry. Mark Pryce's book *Finding a Voice: Men, Women and the Community of the Church* claims that male autobiographical writing can encourage 'the social reconstruction of masculinity.'[70] A priest himself, Pryce is concerned with how men can learn to express personal experience in order to become more self-aware and to encourage reconciliation between communities of difference. Interestingly, although there are plentiful autobiographical references in the text, Pryce avoids discussion of his own priesthood. Perhaps that is too private – or sacred – an area of his life for him to be able to expose to public scrutiny. Although the book may interest men (and

[68] Anthropologist Ruth Behar insists that 'the purpose of bearing witness is to motivate listeners to participate in the struggle against injustice.' Behar, 1996 p.27
[69] Rees, 2002 p.116
[70] Pryce, 1996 p.75. This is not the place to critically investigate Pryce's intended reconsideration of masculinities as a process of 'justice for the whole human community' (p.3), but I admit concern that his interest in gender feels both separatist and essentialist.

women) investigating theological masculinities, it is unlikely to be of benefit to those hoping to learn about priesthood and its construction. A more accessible and deliberately populist text, Joy Carroll's *Beneath the Cassock: The Real-life Vicar of Dibley*, is an account of her life intended to appeal to fans of the enormously popular television comedy[71] but which would inform a wider readership about her life as an Anglican priest and the faith that underpins it.[72] It is unlikely, though, that Carroll's light-hearted descriptions of her adventures at theological college and in various parishes – she describes, for instance, a funeral of a young man who died of AIDS without reference to the attitude of the Church towards same-sex relationships[73] - would be helpful to those wishing to learn about priestly formation, or those reflecting on their own vocation.

Karen Armstrong has written two volumes of autobiography analysing her experiences as a Roman Catholic nun[74] with the deliberate intention of trying to understand a significant period in her life and to redeem the past (she admits candidly that autobiography is 'one of the most challenging genres because it becomes impossible to keep humiliating glimpses of one's former self at bay').[75] Although Armstrong has never felt a calling to ordination, and is fiercely critical of the human devices that attempt to organise and constrain religious belief, her

[71] Joy was the inspiration behind the eponymous character, and advised writer Richard Curtis and actor Dawn French.
[72] 'It was a wonderful opportunity for me to talk about the work of the church in Streatham and to present a positive image of women in the church.' Carroll, 2003 p.134
[73] Carroll, 2003 p.157
[74] *Through the Narrow Gate* and *The Spiral Staircase*
[75] Armstrong, 1997 p.xiii

determination to investigate the significance of her faith on her life, and to identify the often abusive power structures associated with the Church, is of significance to anyone considering the meaning or exercise of ordained ministry. Feminist literary critic Lynne Pearce has pointed out that a reader does not simply project personal experience onto a text, but engages with it by using experience to form a new relationship with the text and its meaning.[76] Armstrong's use of the autobiographical form, her ability to think critically about her own behaviour as well as that of the Church, and her determination to draw parallels between individual, social and political actions (her writing is about both account and accountability) offers new understandings of personal and group identities within a framework of faith.

The 'personal stories' model of texts about priesthood also includes the longstanding literary form of religious biography. Many leading bishops and cathedral deans, controversial or newsworthy members of the clergy, and most Archbishops of Canterbury have found their working lives immortalised in print (Rowan Williams is unusual in that a well-respected biography, *Rowan's Rule*, has been produced – with his approval and participation - whilst he is still in post). As so many of these texts look back upon past lives that, whilst they may inspire affection or admiration, have little other than historical significance to the twenty-first century Church of England, I pay brief attention to only one such book, Michael Hinton's *The Anglican Parochial Clergy*. Hinton's introduction to

[76] Pearce, 1997 p.215

his collection of 'observations' of 'parish priests engaged in ministry and life'[77] is intended not just to celebrate the lives of men who influenced their local communities as well as the wider church, but to reflect upon the history of parish ministry at a time when the future and the shape of the Church of England was being called into question. Containing information about over 600 people, it is not a conventional biography, instead an initial 'portrait gallery' of biographical sketches is followed by thematic chapters investigating such topics as 'pastoring', 'place' and 'intimate experience.' Hinton's text is, at heart, a panegyric to the parochial system, and his illustrations of the clergy who have over the centuries sustained a pattern of ministry rooted in a particular place, serves less to encourage the formation of similar vocations than to induce nostalgia for a time when such a way of life was possible.

'Personal stories' can give insight into the way in which certain priests live, work, express and understand their faith. They can open up new vistas and possibilities, or challenge preconceptions and prejudices. But it is vital to remember that auto/biographical texts are always products of a particular culture and form of expression, are always moderated by the individual telling the story, and always have a political intention.[78] They are never as simple or straightforward as they may appear. Feminist theorists have taken two

[77] Hinton, 1994 p.3
[78] The old feminist saw that 'the personal is political' remains relevant; even a text which has no apparent purpose other than entertainment has made a judgement about the value and commodification of the life of its subject.

conflicting approaches to the use of the personal: that life stories validate and confirm the person who is telling their history,[79] and that it is not the individual that is significant, but the 'representative aspects of the author's experience.'[80] If theology is to learn from the auto/biographical, then it is vital that these two understandings are held in creative tension, acknowledging the worth of each person and honouring the vulnerability that comes with personal expression, whilst actively engaging with the text in order to draw out lessons that are appropriate to other people in other situations. Stories about priesthood require critical analysis if they are to offer more than entertainment.

Investigative texts

Grace Davie, a specialist in the sociology of religion, identified in her 1994 text, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without belonging*, that individuals in late twentieth century Britain had not forsaken religious belief, but lacked the acquired skills and cultural grounding (often developed within a family setting) that enable the formalised practice of faith. In an increasingly secular society, folk religion and rites of passage tend still to take a nominally Anglican shape, but many people actively stay away from places of worship whilst still expecting the Church to be there to administer the occasional offices and in moments of

[79] Carolyn Steedman, 'History and Autobiography: different pasts' in Steedman, 1992 p.49
[80] Felski, 1989 p.94

need. Her central thesis is supported by investigation into the significance of gendered beliefs (women tend to believe in a God of love and forgiveness whilst men focus on a God of power and control), the decision-making processes of the Church of England (Synod reflects the concerns of the smaller, more active membership of the Church rather than the majority in the pews), the paradox of being an established church (although poorly attended, the Church is called upon to voice the moral beliefs of the nation), and the divide between clergy and laity (clergy are on the whole more liberal and less cautious than lay Christians). She also points out that the parochial clergy are likely to be the only people of professional status who live in the more problematic communities which they serve, and that the increased attendance at cathedrals and city centre churches suggests a desire amongst many to move away from 'privatised religion.'[81]

Although Davie's study focuses on the Church as institution rather than priesthood itself, her investigations and conclusions are of enormous importance to all ordained ministers. If, in an increasingly professionalised society, the parish priest is the only person to whom the most vulnerable can turn to for help, then it is vital that theologies of priesthood continue to consider pastoral care and availability to local communities as well as ecclesiastical and doctrinal traditions. If the importance of the local church cannot be measured in the numbers of people who regularly worship there, but should consider its deep symbolic and ritual significance to the local population, expressed particularly at

[81] Davie, 1994 p.110

times of transition, then conventional approaches to analysing the 'success' of a church must be reassessed. If faith practices are 'caught, not taught,' how is the Church to respond to the needs of a generation that has grown up without any experience of attending worship? Above all, what does it mean to be a priest in a society which espouses secularism, but which retains an abiding and persistent – if sometimes unorthodox - religious belief?

Other academics have also taken Davie's identification of 1945 as a turning point in British society and religiosity. Garnet *et al* use their experience as historians to investigate various aspects of contemporary Christian expression in Britain, including the 'performance' of priesthood, the role of women and the influence of church architecture on expressions of belief. Whyte, for example, argues that late-entrants to the priesthood find that 'performing priesthood' gives a freedom and authenticity that is more important than previous professional identities,[82] and criticises Callum Brown's analysis of the role of women in sustaining Christian piety as 'inadequate.'[83] Callum Brown, however, moves from 1945 to identifying the 1960s as a pivotal moment in religious expression in Britain. His influential text *The Death of Christian Britain* claims that until 1800, piety was overwhelmingly masculine, martyrs and ascetics displayed male traits,[84] and femininity was considered to be embarrassing, polluting and

[82] William Whyte, 'Performance, Priesthood and Homosexuality' in Garnett *et al*, 2007 p.88
[83] William Whyte, 'The Jackie Generation: Girls' Magazines, Pop Music, and the Discourse Revolution' in Garnett *et al*, 2007 p.128.
[84] Brown does not address the issue of female saints and martyrs, who have traditionally been venerated for humility, submissiveness and virginity rather than for courage, teaching and

problematic. However, for reasons which Brown is unable to explain, a radical shift in opinion took place between 1800 and the 1950s, when religious belief became exemplified as a female trait, and women became viewed as central to church and national life. Religion was centred on the home, and women, as guardians of the domestic, became responsible for the maintenance and social expression of faith.

In Brown's view, the feminisation of religiosity caused something of a crisis for understandings of masculinity. Men were forced in the home to submit to 'female piety,'[85] and evangelical discourses showed the 'best' of men as being 'weak before their Lord.'[86] 'Manly pleasures' – Brown lists football, alcohol, gambling, sexual impropriety and 'rough behaviour'[87] – induced guilt and were forbidden on Sundays, whilst attending church services involved dressing and behaving in an unnaturally stilted and repressed way. Brown sees no apparent contradiction in the fact that women were also governed by the same expectations of dress and behaviour when attending church; women, it appears, liked dressing up to express their femininity, and church was one of the few places where young women, including domestic staff, could meet and socialise (single men, presumably, had no such interests). Even after the relative freedoms allowed to women in the Second World War, the post-war revival of domesticity caused an immediate increase in numbers of women going to

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steadfastness. Sara Maitland and Wendy Mulford have retold and set in context many of their stories in *Virtuous Magic: women saints and their meanings.*

[85] Brown, 2001 p.88

[86] Brown, 2001 p.102

[87] Brown, 2001 p.139

church, and where women led, their families followed. However, the rise of secularism in the 1960s and a rapid de-feminisation of piety (in Brown's view, intimately linked with feminism) caused women to become as alienated from church structures as men. Secularism replaced belief, and personal freedoms were prioritised over religious structures. Although Brown admits that more women still attend church than men, he insists that they tend to be elderly, predominantly reflecting the mores and identities of an earlier generation. The 'culture of Christianity'[88] in Britain, he believes, has been lost for ever.

Brown's thesis is striking, if contentious. His link between secularisation and feminism seems over-simplified, and his assertion that women held responsibility for the maintenance of faith does not adequately address the fact that churches were, until very recently, places where leadership, theology, liturgical practice, language and understandings of the Divine all reflected a male model. His argument that women's desertion of the Church led to its decline does not consider criticisms that it is the 'feminisation' of the Church[89] that has discouraged male attendance. Brown does not consider the impact of the ordination of women on those inside and outside the church, or of theologies that view Christian faith as offering transformative possibilities. However, the twenty-first century priest must be cognisant of theories of secularisation, and able to place current expressions of faith in their historical context. Brown may

[88] Brown, 2001 p.198
[89] Ian Jones refers to the 'folk belief that the Church was an organisation for women.' Jones, 2004 p.83

present a depressingly negative view of the future of Christianity in Britain, but his text offers a challenge to ordained ministers (and laity) to prove him wrong.

A more positive assessment of the future of the Church of England is provided by Ian Jones, in *Women and Priesthood in the Church of England: Ten Years On*. Utilising detailed case studies, interviews and questionnaires, Jones considers the impact of the ordination of women on the Church, investigates areas of 'unfinished business' and wonders what the future may be for ordained women and for the Church. As an academic rather than a theologian, he is concerned with unbiased interpretation of empirical evidence in order to assess ten years of women's ordained ministry and to consider what the 'key trends and issues[90]' for the Church might be. Jones sets his research in context by providing short illustrative stories of men and women with differing views on, and experiences of, women's ordination to the priesthood, and gives a brief history of female participation in the Church that ranges from first-century Christian communities to early twentieth-century campaigns for the right of women to preach. He makes the point that although some men left the Church after the 1992 vote to ordain women, the numbers of women who would have not been ordained in subsequent years if the legislation had not been passed would probably have been significantly greater.[91]

[90] Jones, 2004 p.3
[91] Jones, 2004 pp.20-21

Jones describes vividly the mixture of emotions when the result of the vote became known, and explains the foundation of Forward in Faith, an Anglo-Catholic organisation concerned to support 'traditionalist' clergy and lay people who could not accept the ordination of women, and Reform, a similar organisation based on an Evangelical understanding. He investigates the response of dioceses and bishops to the decision to ordain women, and points out, crucially, that some people did not simply decide either to agree or disagree with the position the Church had taken, but needed time to reflect, pray and observe the situation. Empirical research shows that clergy attitudes have, over ten years, generally moved towards stronger support, but that those who strongly disagreed with the measure have not tended to change their mind. This has important implications for the way in which contentious decisions are taken by the Church; people who are uncertain of their position might find that a positive experience strengthens their ability to accept and welcome change, but those with strongly-held opinions are unlikely to alter their stance. Current discussions about the ordination of women to the episcopate have sometimes involved pleas for a suitable 'period of reception' to the ordination of women to the priesthood before any further developments are taken. Jones' research suggests that it is unlikely that even an extended period of waiting would produce any significant further consensus on the issue.

Jones describes the lingering belief amongst clergy and laity that ordaining women would add another dimension to the priesthood, and that to deny them

ordination would also be to deny their particular gifts and experiences to the Church. Whilst feminist theories would resist any attempt to suggest that certain patterns of behaviour or characteristics are typically male or female, it is likely that common assumptions about gender roles (for example, that women are caring and empathetic, men are decisive and authoritative) can affect the way in which priests are viewed by their parishioners and the tasks which they are asked to undertake. Jones' research also suggested that the reasons for choosing and belonging to a church are complex, and that the gender of the incumbent – even for those holding strong views about the ordination of women – is not necessarily a significant factor in choosing where to worship. Most significant in terms of this research is Jones' belief that the responses from both clergy and laity demonstrated that they did not have a clear, well-founded understanding of what priesthood is, and what an ordained minister should do. This had a clear impact on their attitudes towards the ordination of women, but it suggests that other complex issues facing the Church need to be underpinned with theological teaching and reflection. The ordained ministry, it seems, is a puzzle to clergy and laity alike.

Women and Priesthood in the Church of England is an enormously valuable study not only on the reception of ordained women, but also in the way in which the Church copes with conflict and change. Even after ten years of experience of women's priesthood, Jones drew out from his respondents stories of confusion and bewilderment, often supported more by 'gut feelings' than by

careful theology, and raising questions about the way in which the wider Church relates to and educates its individual members. What clergy are expected to do, how they are appointed, how senior clergy are chosen, whether there are gender-based or other inequalities, how parishes and deaneries co-operate with each other: each aspect of clerical life reveals the potential for disordered relationships and abuse of authority. Jones points out that we need to 'unmask the discourses of power'[92] that lie behind much theological discussion, and to continue to discover what priesthood means to the faithful and to wider society today. More work is needed if the Church, as institution and as body of Christ, is to face the future with confidence.

Other authors focus specifically on the clergy themselves. Anthony Russell gives a historical overview of *The Clerical Profession*, making two important points about contemporary ministry: that the preoccupations of the clergy are largely marginal to the concerns of wider society, and that ambivalence towards non-stipendiary ministry may be related to a desire to maintain the professional nature of priesthood by insisting that it can never be a part-time occupation or a 'hobby.'[93] (I will return to discussion of non-stipendiary ministry in later chapters.) Helen Thorne's detailed study of the first women priests in the Church of England was one of the first academic responses to the ordination of women, and inspired many subsequent projects that took a close look at the realities of priestly life in contemporary society. Thorne called for the Church to

[92] Jones, 2004 p.209
[93] Russell, 1984 p.287

address the organisational changes that are necessary to provide a working environment that fits with family life;[94] almost a decade later, many of the clergy interviewed for this study expressed similar concerns and frustrations. (A recent study of bishops and their families pointed out that marriage is popular amongst Anglican clergy, and that clergy spouses have to be considered significant factors in ministry.)[95] Ordained ministry is a calling, but the Church cannot afford to ignore the fact that many of its priests, male and female, were called to be spouses and parents before they heard a vocation to ordination.

Towler and Coxon's analysis of Anglican clergymen unsure of their role and uncertain of their future[96] demonstrates that bewilderment about priesthood is nothing new. Comparing studies of Anglican priesthood with those investigating Roman Catholic priests can be revealing; Loudon and Francis claim that most Roman Catholic priests have – unsurprisingly - a 'clear theology of priesthood'[97] but that because they are expected to retain an idealism about the Church, any loss of optimism about their calling leads to rapid withdrawal from active ministry. Hedin suggests that compulsory celibacy is important to Roman Catholic priests' identity as men set apart; as many aspects of ministerial practice, except administration of the sacraments, are opened up to the laity, there is little else that marks them as uniquely dedicated to their calling. It is possible that some of the resistance to the ordination of women in the Church of England is based on similar grounds. If anyone – even women - can undertake

[94] Thorne, 2000 p.145
[95] Davies and Guest, 2007 p.90
[96] Towler and Coxon, 1979 p.34
[97] Loudon and Francis, 2003 p.55

duties formerly reserved to the priesthood (including the administration of Communion by Extension),[98] what is there that sets the ordained priest apart from others? It might be easy to imagine that the multiplicity of understandings of ordained ministry and the looser managerial structure offered by the Church of England can only increase the uncertainty of its priests, but Len Sperry suggests that the reverse may be true. The hierarchical and authoritative approach of the Roman Catholic Church, he believes, contributes to its priests' feelings of helplessness and stress, as it limits the control they have over decision making in their ministry and takes away any sense of autonomy.[99] Priesthood, it would seem, is problematic for reasons which go beyond denominational borders, and crises of identity and performance are likely to strike all of the ordained at some time in their ministries.

Stress amongst the ordained, and analysis of its causes and effects, is the subject of two influential texts, Yvonne Warren's *The Cracked Pot* and Andrew Irvine's *Between Two Worlds*. Irvine theorises that as 'success' in ministry is difficult to define or measure, clergy can become competitive with one another or can overcompensate for their own feelings of inadequacy by working very long hours. When the complex relationship between the consumerist demands of society (requiring a priest of specific gifts and skills for a particular role and place) and the sense of submitting to the Divine calling (in which God promises

[98] The distribution, by an authorised person, of bread and wine that has already been consecrated by a priest.
[99] Sperry, 2003 p.69

to provide what is necessary) are added to clergy insecurities and, in some cases, lack of adequate training or experience, the potential for disaster is huge. Irvine points out that the laity might have skills that better equip them to run the church than their clergy, and that ministers and their families often remain 'outsiders', caring for others but receiving little care themselves. These are serious matters. Warren also points to a sense of uncertainty amongst the clergy she studied, and draws attention to data indicating that feelings of insecurity can manifest themselves as authoritarianism.[100] Her research showed that male clergy were more likely than female clergy to question their identity as priests; women, she suggests, are less interested in challenging the establishment (perhaps as a response to having lived in a society and church environment dominated by men), and she wonders if future generations of ordained women will feel more freedom to explore the boundaries. Jean Cornell suggests that the opposite could be true: women, tired of being identified as a source of conflict and disunity, may concentrate on the ministries that they have been 'allowed' to do rather than working to initiate change at an organisational level of the Church.[101]

Other authors attempt to address practical issues whilst setting priesthood in particular cultural and historical contexts. Ian Bunting points out that differing

[100] This is a significant factor in stories of relationship breakdown recounted by respondents to this project, such as Andrea and Nick.
[101] Jean Cornell, 'Kairos Comes Too Soon: Are Women Priests in Retreat in the Church of England?' in *Feminist Theology 12:1* pp.43-44

models of ministry have, over the last century, rapidly succeeded each other, to the confusion of the clergy person (and presumably their parishioners too). Identifying seven models of priesthood described in contemporary texts: the consultant, the overseer, the competent professional, the practical theologian, the minister in community, the community builder and the middle manager, Bunting adds his own model, that of 'pathfinder,'[102] whilst insisting that models are only of use if they are both relevant and credible. Michael Downey poetically identifies the priest (this time in a Roman Catholic context) as 'the icon of the community's pondering heart'[103] (which though an attractive image seems doomed to leave the priest in a perpetually questioning state) whilst Gordon Kuhrt insists that 'the ministry of Jesus is where we must start [to define Christian priesthood in the twenty-first century Church of England].[104] Whilst Christianity has to take seriously the New Testament understanding of Jesus and his ministry, uncritical acceptance of a first-century male image[105] that does not take into account either the historical understanding of priesthood in the Hebrew Bible, or a Trinitarian rather than Christological expression of divinity, is a partial and potentially limiting model. Kuhrt also draws attention to the unspoken assumption of the Church that parish priesthood is normative, and that other forms of ordained ministry are optional diversions from the real task of the clergy. This is a position which, as will be demonstrated in later chapters,

[102] Bunting, 1996 p.22
[103] Michael Downey, 'Ministerial Identity: A Question of Common Foundations' in Wood, 2003 p.23
[104] Kuhrt, 2000 p.1
[105] Rosemary Radford Ruether asked in 1983, 'can a male saviour save women?' pointing out that over-identification with the human Jesus resulted in the theological doctrine of the maleness of God. Ruether, 2002 pp.98-116

can cause unhappiness and distress to ordinands and the newly ordained, and which may not be sustainable in the face of financial retrenchment and the increasing age profile of ordinands.[106]

Kenneth Mason's *Priesthood and Society* takes a social anthropologist's view in describing priests as both 'religious functionaries'[107] and 'interpreters'[108] of human life, but like Kuhrt reveals his own theological biases in stating that men and women, in accepting a calling to priesthood are being 'called into conformity with Christ crucified.'[109] Feminist theologians have criticised the Christian focus on Christ's crucifixion as damaging to women, as it can be used to encourage submissive victimhood; a more liberating vision might be to concentrate on the Resurrection and its promise of new life. (Recent theological investigation suggests that the Church's interest in theologies of suffering and atonement originated as a tenth-century Western response to political struggles and the desire for conquest.)[110] To concentrate on sacrifical elements of the ordained ministry at the expense of the promise of joyful liberation offered by God is to offer only a partial image of what full personhood can become through Christ.

[106] The recent development of Pioneer Ministry as a discrete category for selection and training does accept that some clergy see their calling as being to something outside the traditional parish setting.
[107] Mason, 2002 p.3
[108] Mason, 2002 p.9
[109] Mason, 2002 p.113
[110] See Brock and Parker, 2008 p.xx: 'the erotic joy of paradise was transformed into a union of eros and torture, worship of violence and victims, and self-inflicted harm.'

'Investigative texts' apply academic principles to their study of priesthood in the Christian churches, and enable and encourage the reader to engage with a variety of theological and sociological understandings. Whilst some of the most influential texts have taken as their starting-point secularist theories that question the survival of organised Christian faith in Britain, they quickly demonstrate that a continuing desire for spiritual fulfilment and companionship through periods of transition in life offer continuing opportunities for the Christian priest to exercise a valuable ministry. The form that this ministry should take is more difficult to define. Rowan Williams points out that Christian faith is not so much about doctrinal systems as about how 'a vision gives shape to a life;'[111] despite the best efforts of many respected authors, the shape that priestly ordination might give to the life of the individual remains elusive.

Boundary Markers

Nicole Ward Jouve, feminist, writer and Christian, insists that identity 'becomes constructed though repeated acts of identification.'[112] How then is an identity of priesthood in the Church of England to be constructed, when acts of identification tend to link the minister with sub-sections of liturgical practice, local communities of faith, and particular theologies or societal groups rather than with a recognisable and clearly definable religious entity? Problematic enough for the white, middle-class, heterosexual, male representative of the Church of

[111] Rowan Williams, 'Belief and Theology: Some Core Questions' in Shortt, 2005 p.4
[112] Ward Jouve, 1991 p.96

England of the popular imagination,[113] such acts of identification are almost impossible for anyone who does not comfortably fit into that particular model. There are potent mythological, ideological and cultural forces at play in both personal and institutional understandings of priesthood, and as Grace Jantzen points out, interpretation of religious matters by those vowed to obedience can never be private, but is subject to the corporate judgement and ultimate authority of the Church.[114] The ever-present threat of being judged unorthodox or heretical makes it dangerous for truly individual priestly identities to be expressed, even to oneself. In order to disentangle some of the complex factors that influence the formation and shaping of priestly identities, with particular regard to issues of gender and power, I turn to feminist theorists and theologians to produce an interrogative framework of understanding and to act as 'boundary markers.'

Feminist theorists like bell hooks are at pains to point out that as human experience involves a multiplicity of possibilities, no one theory can adequately represent all individuals or encompass all experiences. 'Second wave' feminism[115] has been criticised for reflecting the voices of 'a select group of college-educated, middle and upper class, married white women.'[116]

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[113] Typified by *Country Life* magazine's search in 2005 for 'Britain's Most Loved Parson'; the front cover of the magazine showed a finalist, with panama hat, linen jacket and neatly-trimmed beard, cycling towards his picturesque rural church. *Country Life,* 22 September 2005

[114] Jantzen, 1995 p.80

[115] The resurgence of feminist thought in the 1960s and 1970s, often considered to have been inspired by the publication of Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique.* Some commentators refer to more recent expressions of feminism as 'third wave' although others would dispute this identification.

[116] hooks, 1984 p.1

Subsequent writings have preferred to refer to feminist theories rather than feminist theory, and have investigated such issues as class, ethnicity, sexuality, politics, popular culture and ideology. Behind all positions, however, is a desire to understand and critically analyse structures of power within 'the contingencies of gendered identity.'[117] Although, for example, a Marxist feminist would look at the world in terms of systems of production and economic interests,[118] whilst ecofeminism draws links between science and technology's gender bias, and an aggressive stance towards control of both the female body and the body of the earth[119] (a secular but spiritual understanding that has been expanded by female theologians, most notably Sallie McFague),[120] both would attempt to combine a commitment to ending the oppression of women, however it may manifest itself, with analysis of specific, culturally located, experience. 'There is no feminism,' declares Rosi Braidotti, 'beyond the lived experience of women themselves.'[121]

Feminist theories have repeatedly challenged assumptions about the world, claiming that much of our 'knowledge' is based upon a 'mythic past'[122] which offers a safely coherent vision rather than the uncertain and fractured identities of the present. Secular feminism has resonances with feminist theology, which

[117] Kemp and Squires, 1997 p.6
[118] This can cause tensions in that whilst being committed to the cause of freeing women from oppression, a Marxist stance might prioritise the 'interests of the exploited working class' which could involve solidarity with some men against some women. Ramazanoglu, 1989 p.14
[119] See for example Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, 'Ecofeminism' in Kemp and Squires, 1997 p.499
[120] McFague, 1997
[121] Braidotti, 1991 p.170
[122] Jackie Stacey, 'Feminist Theory: Capital F, Capital T' in Robinson and Richardson, 1997 p.59

advocates a hermeneutic of suspicion when reading texts, such as the Bible, which are understood as 'products of an androcentric patriarchal culture and history.'[123] (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, for example, suggests that feminist biblical scholarship should adopt a method which examines writings as a whole, rather than just examining passages which are about women, in order to see how the texts foster the subordination or exploitation of women and marginalised men, and how they can be considered to be transgressive.)[124] Feminists have also investigated gender, claiming that whilst sex is biologically determined, gender (ie the description of individuals as masculine or feminine) is culturally determined by markers such as dress and behaviour.[125] As the Church struggles with issues of gender and inclusion, feminist understandings of gender as performative (which Butler suggests means that the gendered body 'has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality')[126] can shed light on some of the difficulties encountered by male priests who resist the ordination of women (if their male identity is intimately bound up with the performance of their role as priest) and women entering a male institution (if the performance of priesthood conflicts with their internalisation of a female identity). It should be noted, though, that gender theories are hotly contested, and exclusion is usually based on value judgements that involve other issues as well as gender.[127]

[123] Fiorenza, 1994a p.xiv
[124] Fiorenza, 1994b p.4
[125] Oakley, 1972 p.158
[126] Butler, 1990 p.14
[127] Ward Jouve, 1998 p.14

Feminist historians, examining constructs of masculinity and religiosity in Victorian Britain have pointed to links between 'gentility' and religious belief, and to the 'moral power' that came with speaking God's word whilst simultaneously perpetuating, in a colonial setting, what it meant to be English.[128] Connections between imperial and domestic ideologies encouraged paternalistic and maternalistic attitudes, where middle-class men built their identities on assumed superiority over women, children, servants, employees and subjects of the Empire[129] and middle-class women founded anti-slavery organisations and charities to aid 'helpless colonial subjects.'[130] Implicit in such behaviour is the formation of identity based on 'self' defined against 'other' and the assumption of superiority because of inherited privilege. (Liberation theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid believes that women, as 'strangers in their own (religious) land,'[131] can help to develop a critique of postcolonial discourses where Christianity is seen to be the faith of the oppressors.) It is important, when investigating the behaviour of some members of the Church of England when faced with those who are 'other,' to remember that temporary alliances can be created across normal divisions in the face of an immediate threat to the status quo, such as the creation of groups opposed to the ordination of women which attempt to disregard fundamental differences of theological understanding, liturgical practice or churchmanship amongst their members.[132] Although they wield

[128] Hall, 1992 p256, p.207
[129] Hall, 1992 p.207
[130] Clare Midgley, 'Ethnicity, "race" and empire' in Purvis, 1995 p.263
[131] Althaus-Reid, 2004 p.105
[132] Mohanty points to the political expediency demonstrated by Presidents Reagan and Bush in 'forming strategic coalitions across class, race and national boundaries.' Chandra Talpade

considerable influence in their co-ordinated attack on a common enemy, their long-term survival as coherent groups is unlikely. History also demonstrates that there are huge disparities in the treatment of people within discrete groups; to claim that all women are at a disadvantage within the patriarchal confines of the Church and all men are privileged is to ignore the insidious effects of institutional responses to (for example) race, class, age, disability[133] and sexuality. All people might be equally valued in God's eyes, but not all are treated equally by the church communities they wish to serve.

Feminist theologians have taken the insights and academic tools of feminism, and used them to consider religious experience. Rooted in actual contexts and realities, feminist theology has close links with pastoral theology in that it attempts to understand what is happening in a particular place and why, but it examines faith and the church from the viewpoint of women, demanding that those created in God's image are considered equal members of the Body of Christ. For some second-wave feminists, the Church was an irredeemably patriarchal institution, and Christianity was so tainted with a history of oppressive behaviour towards women, that it was impossible to be both a feminist and a Christian. Mary Daly declared herself a 'postchristian radical feminist'[134] and believed that patriarchal images of God, which she saw as closely woven into

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Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses' in Kemp and Squires, 1997 p.92

[133] Mary McClintock Fulkerson describes her experiences in a church which aimed to offer a particular welcome to the disabled as being 'characterised by conviction and ambiguity…plenty of unsaid along with the sharing.' Even the best of intentions can become submerged in the realities of human existence and fallibility. McClintock Fulkerson, 2007 p.6

[134] Daly, 1986 p.xiii

the fabric of society, fostered acceptance of male domination over women. (It should be recognised that later feminist theologians have been critical of Daly's identification of men as 'other,' believing that such a stance undermines the Resurrection by rejecting the possibility of redemption, and ignoring our common humanity by denying the possibility of mutuality between the sexes.)[135] Daphne Hampson also described herself as post-Christian, stating that Christianity had to refer to its historical, patriarchal past in order to understand itself, identifying theology as a 'second-order discipline' and believing God to be part of the self.[136]

Other feminists have focused on the language used to describe God and religious experience. French feminists, with their unique synthesis of philosophy, psychology, linguistics and literary creativity (often described as *écriture feminine)*, saw explorations of religious understanding as fundamental to understanding the ideologies and systems that structure society. Luce Irigaray wrote, in her essay *La Mystérique*, that mystical language and discourse attempts to reach to the essence of the unrepresentable God. A sensuous longing for the divine allows women's consciousness to 'sink into a dark night that is also fire and flames,'[137] allowing 'subject' and 'Other' to mingle as one. For Iragaray, only mysticism allows women to speak with authority and openness, only a deeply personal, emotional understanding of God can begin to

[135] Grey, 1993 p.17
[136] Hampson, 1993 p.169
[137] Luce Iragaray, '*La Mystérique*' in Iragaray, 1985 p.191

overcome the male identity overlaid onto the Divine. 'As long as woman lacks a divine made in her image,' Iragaray writes, 'she cannot establish her subjectivity or achieve a goal of her own.'[138] (Atheist Michel Foucault, whilst preferring to investigate the practice of religion rather than religious belief itself, wrote admiringly of the 'superb' way in which the Church, despite its adherence to principles of obedience, was woven through with 'elements that are imaginary, erotic, effective, corporal, sensual.')[139] Hélène Cixous saw the symbolic and the mythical as a place to be inhabited by women, to bring about 'upheaval' and to 'shatter the framework of institutions.'[140] Julia Kristeva, whilst writing that 'God generally speaks only to men,' added dryly that this does not mean that 'woman doesn't know more about Him.'[141] Although critical of organised religion, which in a French setting implies the Roman Catholic Church, and of the tendency to represent God, and thereby normative faith-led existence, as male, the French feminists suggest that women can bring sexuality, desire, joy and longing[142] into their understanding of divinity. To be a woman is no longer to be eternally 'other.'

For some feminist theologians, it is the cultural and doctrinal assumptions of Christianity that need critical scrutiny. In *Sexism and God-Talk*, Rosemary Radford Ruether sets out a thesis that anything that diminishes the full humanity

[138] Iragaray, 1993 p.63
[139] Carrette, 1999 p.107
[140] Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' in Warhol and Herndl, 1997 p.357
[141] Julia Kristeva, 'About Chinese Women' in Moi, 1986 p.140
[142] Summed up in the Lacanian concept of *jouissance*.

of women cannot be redemptive, and therefore cannot reflect the authentic nature of the divine. The Christian tradition, which has identified male existence as normative, and Jesus as the exemplar of the *imago dei,* has encouraged dualistic views of the world and made the 'Christ paradigm' an 'instrument of sin.'[143] Ruether does not suggest reversing the image to scapegoat men instead of women – the marginalisation of *any* group diminishes humanity – but insists that feminist theology must correct the androcentric categories of Christianity, include women in the 'prophetic norm,'[144] reclaim some of the female images for the Holy Spirit found in early Christian texts[145] and accept that Christ's identity is to be found in the entire Christian community rather than in the historical male person of Jesus. In a recent interview, she acknowledged that the task remains difficult; a 'concerted backlash against feminism' from churches has made it hard for feminists to claim that their critique of sexist oppression hopes to end the marginalisation and oppression of all people, creating a more truly egalitarian society.[146] It is noticeable that in this study, few of the female participants had any familiarity with, or sympathy for, feminist understandings and theology.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, in *In Memory of Her*, points to the irony that the woman who anointed Jesus in *Mark* 14:9 is not identified by name. Taking that

[143] Ruether, 2002 p.16
[144] Ruether, 2002 p.20
[145] Ruether is unimpressed with some Hebrew Bible images of Sophia, seeing her as a dependent expression of the male God rather than a female representation of the divine.
[146] Lisa Isherwood, 'Interview: Rosemary Radford Ruether with Lisa Isherwood' in *Feminist Theology* 24 p.107

moment as paradigmatic for the exclusion of women from Christian history, Fiorenza 'reconstructs' the early church from a feminist perspective, and draws a distinction between patriarchy and androcentrism by utilising the term *kyriarchy*, which implies systems within society or politics that understand the use of power and domination by a privileged person over a marginalised person: the 'rule of the lord/master/father.'[147] By setting Biblical texts in their socio-historical context, Fiorenza attempts to identify examples of women's collaboration with, or their struggling against, patriarchal systems of oppression. Scripture can then be viewed as transformative and emancipatory, because revelation is found in the lived experience of Jesus and in the Christian communities of men and women who followed him. A significant tool in such exploration is recognising and reading the 'silences' in texts; contradictions in the New Testament suggest androcentric redaction, and the way in which stories were told to focus on men and their actions, more reflects the historic marginality of women than any lack of female participation in early Christian communities. Listening to the silences becomes an important tool in this research, as reluctance to speak can indicate crucial areas of conflict and confusion.

Fiorenza begins to draw out in *In Memory of Her* the model of the resurrected Christ as not only Spirit of God, but also as Sophia/Wisdom/Shekinah. Her later

[147] Fiorenza, 1994a p.xix. Whereas 'patriarchy' implies the domination of all men over all women, 'kyriarchy' attempts to remind readers that social hierarchies can lead to many structures of domination.

text, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet* reframes christological discourses 'in terms of a critical feminist theology of liberation;'[148] in other words, by envisaging Jesus as a prophet of Divine Wisdom, announcing the emancipation and transformation of society. By linking Jesus with Divine Wisdom, Fiorenza intends to undermine 'malestream'[149] theologies that valorise suffering and self-sacrifice (such atonement theories are offensive to many feminist theologians, who believe that they encourage victimhood in women), and insists that Christ is to be found amongst the living rather than the dead. Sophialogy allows women to name themselves as part of the Divine, and destabilises fixed notions about God, who is both 'Divine transcendence and human immanence.'[150] In her work, Fiorenza raises difficult questions about the way in which the Church has often considered women from the male viewpoint and her insistence that Christianity is to be revealed in the communities of faith which live out liberationist practices, rather than in looking backwards to sinful kyriarchal structures, challenges the Church to embrace the transformative possibilities demonstrated by Christ's resurrection.

The way in which some biblical texts have been considered to be damaging to women has been explored by feminist scholars. Sandra Schneiders, recognising that scripture arose from a patriarchal culture, criticises the way in which the 'word of God' has legitimated and promoted male oppression of

[148] Fiorenza, 1999 p.3
[149] Fiorenza, 1999 p.126
[150] Fiorenza, 1996 p.xxxiv

women. As language is 'a human phenomenon,' nothing about it is 'literally pertinent to divine self-disclosure.'[151] She too argues that biblical texts can be interpreted as offering liberating possibilities, but insists that such interpretation requires care. Oppressive texts need to be named as such, and inclusive-language versions of these texts should be developed so that the intention of the text can be made clear. There is a clear difference, Schneiders believes, between scripture as witness to revelation rather than the embodiment of it; until biblical texts are 'fully engaged from a contemporary hermeneutical and dialectical perspective,'[152] it will be impossible to discover whether they are eternal carriers of patriarchal ideology, or if they could be resources for the liberation of women from oppression. Phyllis Trible, in contrast, tells four narratives she discovers in the Hebrew Bible as 'sad stories…tales of terror with women as victims.'[153] She avoids simplistic justification of these scriptural texts, rejecting any notion of the pre-Christian era as being more 'primitive' than that which followed it; reminding her readers that God remains God, whether the God of Jesus or of Israel; acknowledging that *all* suffering is terrible, even in comparison with the Cross; and denying the possibility that the Resurrection might redeem the misery experienced by the women in these stories. Rather than wrestling with biblical texts as Schneiders, Fiorenza and others have done, to 'revision' meaning and uncover hidden histories, Trible tells the stories bleakly, as memorials to outrages committed and women abused. They stand

[151] Sandra M Schneiders, 'The Bible and Feminism' in Mowry LaCugna, 1993 p.38
[152] Schneiders, 2004 p.65
[153] Trible, 2002 p.1

as paradigms for 'encountering terror,' recognising that sometimes the sin of the world is not transformed by God's presence.

Interpretation and meaning of the Bible is currently a particular area of controversy, with literalist interpretations of texts being used to 'prove' male headship and the scriptural impossibility of ordaining women, so it is good to be reminded that the way in which we approach religious texts is related to issues of power and authority as well as to our understandings of divinity and revelation (Serene Jones points out the way in which talk of 'otherness' in religious settings is often framed in terms of 'sin')[154]. However, the dual status of scripture as both the expression of a particular historical culture and as understanding of God's relationship with humanity means that it cannot be taken lightly or carelessly. Although 'the historiography of androcentrism is that of the winners,'[155] Trible, Ruether and Fiorenza demonstrate that the Christian community, if it is truly to reflect the love of God, must not merely talk about theology and doctrine. It is the way in which the message of redemption is lived out in practice that matters.

The final category of feminist theology that acts as one of my 'boundary markers' is that which investigates the actual experiences of women in faith

[154] Jones, 2000 p.96
[155] Schottroff, 1995 p.36

settings. By observing and listening to women as they participate in church activities or exercise ministries, then considering their experiences within a theoretical framework, such work allows for critical, creative reflection on practice, system and institution. The feminist stance of the researchers insists that the women involved are not 'subjects' but play an active role in developing meaning, whilst the researchers' commitment to theological understandings of grace and possibility encourages them to commend good practice and develop greater understanding between those in differing religious, cultural or social locations. Their engagement is deeply personal, but their conclusions aim to benefit both the academy and the individual. As Serene Jones expresses, 'high theory and local wisdom make wonderful companions.'[156]

Uta Blohm's research, investigating what women priests, ministers and rabbis think about their religious roles, the traditions they inhabit and whether their gender influences what they do, fits into the feminist tradition of 'giving voice' to women and listening to previously untold stories. Blohm's Lutheran background means that at times she is a little unsure of the intricacies of ministerial opportunities within the Church of England (for example understanding the diaconate as purely transitional and non-stipendiary ministry as always part-time and therefore 'inferior'),[157] but the fact that she is denominationally detached from the Church gives her investigations a dispassionate clarity. Comparing and

[156] Jones, 2000 p.2
[157] Blohm, 2005 p.44

contrasting the experiences of women across a range of religious traditions, whilst drawing only general conclusions, allows Blohm to point to significant differences in cultural approaches to faith; Jewish interviewees describe the impact of religious festivals on family life in the home, whilst the nominally Christian nature of British society means that the secular year is structured around Christian festivals. Blohm does not make any analysis of this point, but it is possible, because the Church of England as the Established Church could be seen as representative of all those who do not actively pursue any other expression of faith, that 'belonging' in terms of active membership (ie attending church) is often not felt to be necessary. To practice Judaism involves rituals at home as well as involvement with a synagogue, and requires, in Britain, a degree of dedication to pursuing a pattern that is counter to prevailing cultural expectations. Christianity, in contrast, might be assumed to be a 'default position' unless it is specifically rejected.

Questions of vocation and its recognition underpin many of Blohm's interviews with Anglican priests, but are not seen as relevant to her respondents from other traditions. A Jewish woman describes how she saw the Rabbinate as 'a good use of [her] skills,'[158] whilst Christian women refer to the supernatural basis of their calling, often describing their resistance to the initial sense of vocation. Judaism is shown as approving and legitimising a questioning attitude to God,

[158] Blohm, 2005 p.91

where it is not only possible but desirable to be 'angry and perplexed,'[159] whilst an Anglican priest only returned to the Church when she felt it possible as an adult to begin questioning some of her difficulties with Anglican doctrine and culture. Many of Blohm's interviewees referred to a lack of female role models when they first began considering religious leadership, leading to their questioning if their desires were possible or legitimate, and encouraging stereotyping or lack of self-esteem. However, overcoming resistance and entering ministry was seen as empowering – for Christian women, the process of official recognition of their vocation through testing and acceptance could be as important as the moment of ordination itself – although differences in theology affect the way in which ordination is understood. Blohm suggests that the ritual surrounding ordination might help to make apparent the transition from one way of life to another, and that ordination might have a greater effect on other people than on the priest herself.

The comments made by the women interviewed by Blohm suggest that further investigation needs to be done into specifically Anglican understandings of priesthood within the Church of England, with particular reference to the expectations placed upon ordained women and their self-understanding of the role they promise to undertake. Blohm's research implies that feminist thought has not significantly underpinned the vocations of many Anglican women (a suggestion confirmed by the research material in this project), although the

[159] Blohm, 2005 p.98

issues that they raise about understandings of God, liturgical language, essentialist gendered expectations and tension between care of parishioners and care of spouse and children, have all been issues considered by feminist theory. One interviewee raised the point that younger female clergy might be less well-equipped to deal with discrimination and structural failings than those who have already spent much of their lives coping with sexism. It has already been pointed out that unlike clergy training in the USA, training for ordination in the Church of England rarely involves study of feminist theory or theology. Without the academic tools to deal with false assumptions, there is a danger that women will assume failings of the institution to be personal inadequacies.

A very different approach is taken by Ellen Clark-King, who focuses on the female members of Anglican, Roman Catholic and Methodist congregations in the industrial North-East of England. Her intentions are to discover if the Church lives up to its task to build just communities as well as offering worship, and to find out if feminist theology, originally rooted in educated middle-class experience, really listens to the voices of those marginalised by society. For Clark-King, theology is the task of *all* God's people, and needs to be based upon experience rather than theory. Theology, she believes, is 'part of our everyday reflection on our relationship with God.'[160] Using a semi-structured interview format, combined with observation in church settings, the experiences and

[160] Clark-King, 2004 p.3

beliefs of women who identify themselves as working-class are carefully offered as a rich theological resource.

Clark-King contrasts the outward appearance of the worship she observes at the churches in her study with the realities of what it means to be a minister, or a member of the congregation, in each place. Power and authority does not necessarily reflect doctrinal practice and ordained ministers appear to be almost incidental to the understandings of their congregations. Church communities reflect local communities, and attending church is as much about maintaining a strong geographical identity as it is about prayer and worship. This is not to suggest that faith is subsidiary to community – it is very clear that it is a deep relationship with God that underpins the affection with which the women view their churches – but to emphasise how important it is that faith is expressed within a supportive and familiar environment.

The women interviewed by Clark-King frequently expressed very traditional understandings of theology, particularly noticeable in their use of language when describing God. Clark-King theorises that for many of her interviewees, God is 'the perfect male figure,'[161] a romantic ideal who affirms their self-worth, and she finds herself torn between recognising the value found in the traditional patriarchal vision of God, and feminist interpretations that claim God as being beyond gender. She sees the women's understandings of God as being empowering in the sense that they provide validation and encouragement, but

[161] Clark-King, 2004 p.72

lacking in that they do not offer empowerment to the interviewees themselves as women. Female spirituality is most commonly incarnated in the figure of Mary (problematic to some feminists because of the impossibility of ever matching the ideal image of virginity and motherhood), who fascinatingly is understood by one woman as the third person of the Trinity. Although Clark-King finds herself concerned by the imagery used by the women in her study, she recognises that positive images of female aspects of divinity will only become relevant when women see themselves as valued by the society in which they live. Until then (and encouraging social justice can be a prophetic task for the Church), it is necessary to build on whatever images are helpful, supplementing them with others, rather than trying to replace them with more theoretically progressive versions.

The parish priest, although a respected figure, is unlikely to supplant the dominance of women in their homes. Mothers rule over the domestic sphere and although their church-going is unlikely to be shared by the wider family (apart from visits to church for the Occasional Offices, it is often the women, as identified by Callum Brown,[162] who maintain the practice of faith), it is their relationship with God that gives them the model for maintaining their human relationships. In some ways, the women identified by Clark-King are closer to the Jewish women described by Uta Blohm than the Christian practitioners of theological theory; although the home is not the centre of religious expression, it

[162] Clark-King however disagrees with some key points of Brown's thesis. Clark-King, 2004 p.149

is the focus of a domestically-based ideology shaped by faith. Church is the place in which they can feel particularly close to God, receiving strength and encouragement for their daily lives, but the real work of building community begins at home.

Mary McClintock Fulkerson takes a similar approach in her investigation of the way in which a Methodist church in the USA attempts to offer a welcome to people with profound disabilities. Rooted in feminist theory and concerned with the 'markers of difference' that exist within a particular community of faith, her study utilises aspects of cultural anthropology, practical theology, postmodern place theory (which she understands as not just linking together geographical landscapes with lived experience, but exploring the 'unified reality'[163] created by histories, experiences, locations and subjects), and social history in order to understand both *why* things happen in a particular way, and *how* they shape both people and practices. Fulkerson uses an ethnographic approach, closely observing situations, describing them in detail, and subjecting them to reflective analysis. Like Clark-King, her attention is focused on the apparently mundane and ordinary; it is, she believes, in everyday practices of faith that transformation becomes possible, and in the Incarnation, the worldliness of God, that lived experience should be valued and honoured. Fulkerson is more ready than Clark-King to challenge practices or understandings that she sees as unjust, but she insists that theological reflection must begin from where people are, not where we might wish them to be. Theology arises out of situations and place.

[163] Fulkerson, 2007 p.28

Fulkerson and Clark-King's studies are enormously valuable to anyone considering how theology might best be lived out 'from the heart.' The understandings of the women involved in Clark-King's research might not fit into neat theories, and their conservatism could give concern to those who believe that feminist theologies offer emancipative opportunities to women and men (Clark-King herself admits that the God described to her is a God of survival rather than of transformation), but they are truthful and inspirational accounts that reflect reality rather than detached idealism. For any priest, listening and being prepared to learn from the whole people of God must be a priority. Sean Gill has pointed out that histories of women's involvement in Anglicanism have concentrated on the experiences of middle and upper-class women, partly because of the survival of their diaries, letters and biographies.[164] If analyses of the twenty-first century Church of England are not to reflect the biases of class, education and gender that have skewed previous accounts, then it is vital that the voices of those commonly marginalised by society or academia are respected and heard. This includes the voices of ordinands and clergy who might never reach the exalted rank or reputation that causes their lives and utterances to be given close attention. As people struggling to make sense of the way in which belief in God affects their lives and the lives of those they meet and serve, they have something important to say.

[164] Gill, 1994 p.2

Summary

Few travellers would set out into unfamiliar territory without first consulting a guidebook. The type of text they choose might reflect the type of journey they intend to take, the terrain they intend to traverse, their interests and their experience, but most would want to be informed about where they were going, what they could expect to find there, and what they might encounter along the way. The journey to ordained ministry, however, lacks adequate written forms of mapping or guidance. Contemporary literature about priesthood fails to address two crucial issues: what the Church understands twenty-first century priesthood in the Church of England to be, and how individuals develop a coherent and sustainable priestly identity.

It is clear that ideas about priesthood in the Church of England are both varied and hotly contested, but without clarity about the theology that underpins priestly vocations, and overt guidance from the Church about what it expects its ordained clergy to believe and to do, men and women entering the priesthood are vulnerable to confusion, misdirection and self-doubt. They are led by the Holy Spirit, but they are accountable to the Church as well as to God, and they will be required, at least in the early years of their ministries, to carry out the duties to which the Church itself gives priority. For most, this will entail serving a curacy in an unfamiliar parish setting and working closely with a more

experienced parish priest. It is a period of time that can build the successful foundations for a lifetime of ministry, or that can fatally diminish confidence in calling and abilities alike.

Although it might appear at first sight that the self-understandings of those ordained to Anglican ministries are likely to be most closely linked to theological and doctrinal understandings, the work of researchers interested in issues of context and place suggest that the social, historical and geographical locations in which priesthood is practised can be highly significant in developing and challenging individual priestly identities. How the Church recognises and facilitates the process of priestly formation, a life-long process, in the face of rapidly changing ideas about religion, authority, gender and society, requires greater attention to be paid to the voices of those training for, and in the early years of, ordained ministry. This study hopes to redress that balance.

Chapter 2

Organisation

Introduction

The previous chapter cast an eye over the types of literature currently investigating priesthood, and discovered that the 'guidebooks' available to potential ordinands are insufficiently comprehensive or contemporary to be of real use in preparing for the journey. Where they might look for the theological equivalent of a *Rough Guide* or a *Lonely Planet*, aspirants to the Anglican priesthood are instead presented with the theological equivalent of a *Baedeker* or *Bradshaw*; interesting snapshots of another way of life, of interest more to armchair historians than current travellers. I now consider how to interpret the information gathered about routes taken to priesthood and the landscape traversed on the journey: the methodological key to reading the map. In order to investigate the way in which both men and women recently ordained into the Church of England develop and sustain their priestly identities, my interest in issues of gender, power and authority demands the use of a methodology that is congruent with feminist theories and ideals. The relatively short length of time in which women have been admitted to ordination in the Church of England and continuing debates about the rightness of that decision means that ordained

women suffer the double bind of being seen as a focus of disunity whilst having few role models to guide and inspire them. At the same time, secularist theories outside the Church and increasingly 'fragmented'[165] understandings within it lead both women and men to wonder what their futures as priests might be. Feminist theories enable the examination of culture and society with particular attention to the difference between the experiences of women and men,[166] with the overarching desire to challenge and improve oppressive or unjust situations.

I recognise that this approach is not without risk, as 'feminism'[167] can be a term which causes some nervousness in Church settings because of its political and polemic overtones. Carol Christ has suggested that women and men utilising feminist techniques in the field of religious study are 'punished' for advocating feminism whilst those who do not challenge the predominantly patriarchal status quo are 'not perceived as advocating anything,'[168] and self-identified Tasmanian Aboriginal Lee Miena Skye points out that women in minority communities can avoid the term because they understand it as implying criticism of the men they know to be as much victims of racism as they themselves are victims of sexism.[169] I believe that, in their arising from a movement which desires to affirm the value and completeness of all personhood, feminist approaches are

[165] Francis, Robbins and Astley, 2005 p.141
[166] Ramazanoglu, 1989 p.8
[167] More correctly, 'feminism**s**,' as discussed in the previous chapter.
[168] Carol P Christ, 'Whose History are we Writing: Reading Feminist Texts with a Hermeneutic of Suspicion' in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* vol. 20 no. 2 p.61
[169] Lee Miena Skye, 'Response to Monica A Coleman' in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* vol. 22 no.1 p.120

fully compatible with the scriptural tenets that Christ came 'that they may have life, and have it abundantly' (John 10:10) and that 'there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28).[170] Some feminists have suggested strategies to cope with the difficulties attached to the term: bell hooks proposes using the phrase 'I advocate feminism' when a focus on lifestyle and identity makes it too problematic to call oneself a feminist[171] and Monica Coleman commands 'thou shalt sneak in feminism when conditions are averse to its naming,'[172] but both approaches feel in a specifically Christian context to be dishonest and fearful. I find that it is impossible to declare myself a Christian, believing in the innate value of all human life, created in God's image and loved by God without reservation, without also claiming the name 'feminist.'

My interest is not confined to discovering how ordained women have responded to vocation within an organisation which still remains predominantly male-centred[173] (although this is an important strand in my research, as are the reactions of ordained men to working with female colleagues within an increasingly inclusive society), but on how women *and* men face the challenges of becoming priests in the twenty-first century, and what the Church does to facilitate and support their journeys. This I believe to be compatible with feminist

[170] All Biblical quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.
[171] hooks, 1984 p.30
[172] Monica A Coleman, 'Reflections on the "Teaching for Change" Conference: The Business of Feminist Teaching' in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 23 no. 2. p.102
[173] Church history, liturgy, theology and scripture has always privileged the male and the dominant metaphorical image of God remains 'Father' and of Christ, 'Son.' Theologian Mary Grey, amongst others, discusses the implications of exclusive language for the divine in Grey, 2001 p.9 ff.

ideals of freedom from oppression, and feminist theology's desire to develop relationships based upon 'mutuality.'[174] I fully acknowledge my debt to feminist scholarship; previous graduate study in Women's Studies[175] opened up the desire to link events and consequences, to learn from a wide-ranging body of practical, theoretical and individual knowledge, and to make such learning transformative. However, following the way in which feminist researchers have utilised interdisciplinary techniques, I believe 'boundary crossing' to be a valuable research tool, and choose to use feminist approaches to investigate a wide range of questions, including, but not exclusively, those related to gender and power. Such an approach is increasingly gaining acknowledgement in academic circles, with respected figures such as Ursula King recognising that much contemporary research is 'gender inclusive rather than woman-centred.'[176] Feminist theories can offer valuable insight into structures and relationships, whilst reminding the researcher that knowledge is both contingent and reflexive. Based on the desire to achieve the transformation of unjust situations, they form the bedrock of this research project.

Utilising Feminist Theories

Although feminists take a variety of theoretical approaches to their investigation of the factors that shape women's lives, most would agree on the fact that their

[174] Isherwood and McEwan, 2001 p.9
[175] Heather Walton describes Women's Studies in university contexts as 'one of the most sustained projects in interdisciplinary cooperation to have emerged within the contemporary academy.' Walton, 2007 p.22
[176] Ursula King and Rita M Goss in Salomonsen, 2002, preface.

research has serious practical and political implications. Feminists desire change, and see theory as the means to an end rather than as informing the creation of an abstract body of knowledge. Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones, pointing out that theory must be related to actual lives, write that 'feminists refuse to accept that inequalities between women and men are natural and inevitable and insist that they should be questioned.'[177] In response, feminist researches have paid close attention to the experiences of women, often prioritising the 'authenticity' of personal accounts and preferring qualitative research over quantitative methods, which have been criticised as being 'masculinist'[178] in emphasising a falsely-sustained academic detachment in the collection of 'facts' and creating imbalances of power between researcher and the objectified 'subject'. However, poststructuralist and postmodernist theories have caused some feminists to question whether it is possible for 'truth' to be discerned through experiential accounts, claiming that identities of both researcher and those whose lives are researched are fluid and contradictory, giving merely the illusion of a 'unified and coherent self.'[179] (Judith Butler suggests that identity is a 'normative ideal'[180] and Donna Haraway writes that identities are 'partial and strategic.'[181]) If this is true, then recognising any research as representative of women's lives is problematic, as overarching concepts such as 'woman,' 'knowledge,' or 'patriarchy' become impossible. If

[177] Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones, 'Thinking for Ourselves: an Introduction to Feminist Theorising' in Jackson and Jones, 1998 p.1
[178] Mary Maynard, 'Methods, Practice and Epistemology: The Debate about Feminism and Research' in Maynard and Purvis, 1994 p.11
[179] Jackie Stacey, 'Feminist Theory: Capital F, Capital T' in Robinson and Richardson, 1997 p.55
[180] Butler, 1990 p.16
[181] 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century', Haraway, 1991 p.155

such concepts are challenged, suggests Jackson, 'we can find ourselves with no place from which to speak as women and from which to make political demands or to challenge patriarchal structures (which themselves are held to have no existence except within feminist discourse).'[182]

Postmodern feminists disagree with this assessment. Michèle Barrett believes that the former certainties within feminism of concepts like 'patriarchy' should be replaced by the provisional and contingent understandings suggested by postmodernist theory. Language is not simply to do with knowledge, but with what it is possible to say at particular times and in particular circumstances; it *constructs* as well as conveys meaning.[183] Language is a carrier of ideology – particularly important in the Church of England, where authorised liturgical language about God, especially in the pivotal sacrament of the Eucharist, almost always uses male descriptors – and is a vehicle of power. Throughout the history of the Church of England, it seems, maleness has not only been socially and structurally normative, but has been closely related to the Divine. The academic discipline of translation studies, paying close attention to the way in which language can provide clues to the way in which gender becomes an aspect of agency, uses poststructuralist theory to describe language as 'rhetoric, logic [and] silence.'[184] What is *not* expressed might be as important as what is

[182] Stevi Jackson, 'The Amazing Deconstructing Woman' in *Trouble and Strife* no. 25, p.29. Jackson also points out that postmodernism is based on the work of 'fashionable' male linguistic theorists like Lacan, Derrida and Foucault.
[183] Michèle Barrett, 'Words and Things: Materialism and Method in Contemporary Feminist Analysis' in Barrett and Phillips, 1992 p.203
[184] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Politics of Translation' in Venuti, 2000 p.398 and p.399

able to be said. Jane Flax similarly believes that postmodernism encourages us to become sceptical about beliefs that 'are often taken for granted within and serve as legitimation for contemporary Western culture.[185] Gender issues are not about simple binary oppositions, but about social relations with all their messiness and ambivalence, so feminist theories should question their own assumptions and their location within social and cultural settings, as well as the situations to which they are applied. There are no guarantees that because research or process simply identifies itself as 'feminist,' it will be conducted ethically or have a liberating outcome. Without self-critical reflexivity,[186] feminist theories risk becoming as prescriptive as the circumstances and ideologies that they wish to understand.

Stanley and Wise suggest five elements that must be present in order for theory to be considered feminist. [187] Firstly, it should be based upon experience that is critically analysed by feminists. Although this might be contested by some theorists, I consider that the term 'feminist' can be applied to anyone who desires to challenge circumstances and situations that are oppressive of women, hence allowing critical analysis by both women *and men* if they are committed to issues of liberation and justice. Furthermore, such theory should be continually revised as a result of experience and should be 'reflexive and

[185] Jane Flax, 'Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory' in Nicholson, 1990 p.41
[186] 'The process of critical self-reflection' that enables researchers to be aware of the way in which they are contributing to the process. Swinton and Mowat, 2006 p.59
[187] Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, 'Method, methodology and epistemology in feminist research processes' in Stanley, 1990 p.24

self-reflexive' (i.e. it should be prepared to reflect upon the research process itself).[188] Slee's suggestion that reflexivity largely involves 'transparency about the research process' is a reminder that the process of undertaking academic research, and the way in which the research material is presented to readers involves ethical decisions that must maintain the highest standards of care and concern for those participating in the study. Feminist researchers should be aware of the assumptions that they bring into their study, be concerned with the ethical dimension of what it is that they are trying to achieve, consider the effect that taking part in research might have upon participants, and be open to the fact that conducting the research could have an impact on their own lives and understandings.[189]

Stanley and Wise believe, finally, that feminist theory is the property of everyone and that it should never be considered 'sacrosanct' and unchallengeable. Feminist approaches look for interconnectedness between situations and experiences, for instance, considering that racism experienced by black women is related to historical factors *and* gender roles that are constructed around racial assumptions; discrimination is related to assumptions about class, gender and femininity as well as race.[190] Feminist theorists are also ready to utilise insights from a variety of academic disciplines. Feminist literary theory can shed light on

[188] 'In practice, the principle of reflexivity has much to do with transparency about the research process and is evident in the way in which research is both conducted and written up.' Slee, 2004 p.51
[189] Mary Maynard, 'Methods, Practice and Epistemology: The Debate about Feminism and Research' in Maynard and Purvis, 1994 p.16
[190] Pratibha Parmar, 'Gender, Race and Class: Asian Women in Resistance' in CCCS, 1983 pp.237-258

the construction of meaning through language and texts; psychoanalytic theory considers identity, sexuality and 'difference;' feminist history[191] examines power structures and gendered experiences; and so on. Feminist research is committed to diversity in 'approaches, positions and strategies,'[192] it desires to bring about change where such change is felt to be necessary and good, and it grounds theory in lived experience.

This means for me that any research into the understandings of ordinands and the recently-ordained has to allow their voices to be heard. Although quantitative approaches to statistics about (for example) the gender balances of those accepted for training for ordination, could shed light on some of the issues facing the Church, my principal interest is on how individuals react to the circumstances in which they find themselves. I therefore determined to use qualitative rather than quantitative methods. However, bearing in mind the principles above, I was anxious to avoid two things: an imbalance between researcher and participant that would promote the researcher to 'expert' and the participant to 'subject,' and an assumption that I knew what was important and was searching for evidence to confirm a particular research position. Although ordained myself, and although I had reflected deeply on what the process of training and moving into a parish meant to me, my personal expectations and understandings are precisely that: personal and therefore unique. It might be

[191] June Purvis draws a distinction between 'women's history' (the lives of women, often those with influence or importance), 'feminist women's history' (history informed by feminist theories and taking women as its subject) and 'feminist history' (researching the lives of women and men through the lens of feminism). Purvis, 1995 p.7
[192] Kemp and Squires, 1997 p.3

that some of the thoughts I have about becoming a priest, and some of the experiences I had undergone would be shared – at least in part - by others, but it could be that I would find myself challenged and tested by what I discovered during the research process. The research therefore had to be predicated upon drawing out information from each participant, rather than on discovering their responses to a predetermined set of 'closed' questions. This led me to an interview-based process with as wide as possible a research group and as long a possible period of extended contact. It would be time-consuming and require complex interpretation, but it would be the only way I could envisage discovering the information I sought whilst maintaining the feminist ethical approach that would underpin my research.

Exploring feminist theologies

Feminist approaches, with their focus on understanding and transforming unjust and oppressive situations, are in many ways ideal theoretical partners for theological investigations. Feminist theologians have utilised the tools of feminist research in order to examine the ethical dimensions of world, society and Church, casting a critical eye on assumptions of how things are have traditionally been, and envisioning what they could become. (As Janet Martin Soskice points out, feminism can only be of lasting value to theology if as well as criticising, it also develops constructive possibilities for the future.)[193] Most closely associated with pastoral theology, which reflects upon the practical

[193] Martin Soskice, 2007 p.4

applications of theology to actual experience - although for some feminists the very term 'pastoral theology' creates difficulties because of the hierarchical implications of the metaphor of shepherds and sheep[194] - feminist theologies consider the gendered implications of Christian understanding and practice. This is by no means a straightforward task, as the very fact that the Church itself is seen simultaneously as a communal expression of the love of God and as a flawed human institution which has contributed to gendered exclusion, creates resistance from those who believe their devoutly held beliefs, or authoritative boundaries, to be threatened by feminist approaches. Whether or not one agrees with Katie Cannon's assessment that Christians who dismiss feminism in churches or in theological education are actually angry about the potential loss of their own power,[195] or Mary Daly's assertion that resistance to feminist insights are due to 'vested interest' that can make it difficult even to recognise the problems raised by feminisms,[196] feminist approaches can worry those who are reluctant to face change. They are therefore vulnerable to being dismissed or undermined. Rosemary Radford Ruether has identified a 'concerted backlash against feminism in the churches,'[197] and Owen Thomas points out the paradox that whilst the flexibility of Anglicanism's approach to doctrinal matters might

[194] Zoë Bennett Moore believes that the shepherd and sheep model 'has been and still is used to foster paternalistic and dependent attitudes.' Bennett Moore, 2002 p.9
[195] Cannon, 1985 p.12
[196] Daly, 1985 p.78
[197] Lisa Isherwood, 'Interview: Rosemary Radford Ruether with Lisa Isherwood' in *Feminist Theology* 24 p107.

make it relatively open to the possibility of feminist theology, its diverse and non-confessional nature makes it less likely to be transformed by feminist insights.[198]

Woodward and Pattison describe pastoral theology as being transformative, confessional, honest, unsystematic, and more inclined towards asking questions about practice than in reaffirming orthodoxy.[199] Feminist theologies, which have been described as 'advocacy theology,'[200] bear close similarities to pastoral theology in the way in which they critically consider the way in which the Church builds and sustains cultures of faith, and the scriptural and doctrinal understandings that create layers of meaning and expectation. Faith communities are seen as places of 'ambiguity and grace,'[201] where differences matter and where boundary negotiation is a continual and necessary process; Elaine Graham sees ethics and politics as considerations that are provisional and strategic rather than fixed, and which depend upon becoming 'practices rather than applications of metaphysical ideals.'[202] The way in which feminist theories value pluralities, reflecting upon varying viewpoints and rejecting simple binary oppositions (in/out, good/bad, doctrine/heresy) encourages an understanding of feminist theologies as active processes in which the insights gleaned from the stories and experiences of people of faith lead to spiritual reflection and intentional action. Feminists have made clear that it is impossible

[198] Owen C Thomas, 'Feminist Theology and Anglican Theology' in Heyward and Phillips, 1992 p.151
[199] Woodward and Pattison, 2000 p.15
[200] Anne E Carr, 'The New Vision of Feminist Theology: Method' in Mowry LaCugna, 1993 p.9
[201] McClintock Fulkerson, 2007 p.6
[202] Elaine Graham, 'The Nature of Practical Theology' in Woodward and Pattison, 2000 p.110

to speak authoritatively on behalf of another ('If you are white, affluent and female…the typical woman does not look like you or live like you, may not think like you, and certainly does not know your experience of gender grounded in class and race privilege'),[203] so feminist theologies must bring together the varying questions raised by women's experiences in an attempt to remain in mutually respectful dialogue with those of different understandings. In response to the way in which feminist theories are prepared to accept insights from a variety of disciplines, feminist theologies are open to the understandings expressed by people of differing faith traditions; much creative theological and liturgical work has been done by Roman Catholic women who are still forbidden ordination (Susan Ross theorises that their position encourages freedom of thought in a way that would not be possible if they became part of the ordained priesthood),[204] and Jewish feminists have shed light on Christianity's tendency to express unconsciously anti-Judaic sentiments when describing Jesus as a proto-feminist in a society relentlessly antagonistic towards women.[205]

Feminist theologies demonstrate that theology is lived out in practice, and that theological understandings can grow out of complex and difficult situations. Serene Jones sees the way in which feminist theories look at present situations as bearing the mark of redemption, whilst hoping for a better future, as being

[203] Mary Elizabeth Hobgood, 'Solidarity and the Accountability of Academic Feminists and Church Activists to Typical (World-Majority) Women' in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion,* Vol.20 no.2 p;143
[204] Susan A Ross, 'God's Embodiment and Women' in LaCugna, 1993 pp.186-7
[205] See particularly the work of Judith Plaskow, and Carol P Christ, 'Does Feminism Need a Metaphysic?' in *Feminist Theology* Vol.13.3 p.283

essentially eschatological,[206] and feminist theologians do not hesitate to name behaviour that creates oppressive and unjust situations as sinful.[207] For some Christian feminists, the Church as it stands is too tainted by patriarchal understanding to provide an environment in which women are able to flourish. Rosemary Radford Ruether envisages a new creation, 'women-church', which provides a liminal community that sits between historic models of church and the spirit-led possible future. For Ruether, women-church would be based around gatherings of women, who would share their experiences of patriarchal religiosity and begin to create liturgies that could help to 'midwife' their new beginnings.[208] Far from the institutional clericalism of the traditional Church, women-church would deliberately dismantle hierarchical structures, sweep away the 'legitimising myth'[209] of apostolic succession, recognise the work of the Holy Spirit in all members of the community, and base ministries on need rather than on appointment. Although women-church is envisaged as a transitional phase between historic, episcopal models of church, and a new, inclusive future that it is not yet possible to imagine, Ruether appears to have rejected any possibility of salvation for women within traditional expressions of church. Her image of redemption is, for the present, firmly separatist.

[206] Jones, 2000 p.10
[207] Owen C Thomas, 'Feminist Theology and Anglican Theology' in Heyward and Phillips, 1992 p.145
[208] Ruether, 1985 pp.59-61
[209] Ruether, 1985 p.32

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza envisages an 'ekklesia of wo/men'[210] which utilises the experiences of oppressed wo/men to transform the church into a place of liberation for all, transcending its current 'predicaments, locations and liberations.'[211] She does not necessarily advocate moving away from existing religious structures and denominations, although this always remains a matter of choice, but insists that feminists who are Christian must not be dissuaded from their 'spiritual authority' to examine, critically assess and re-articulate the understandings of the Bible and the Church.[212] All women in her 'ekklesia' must, however, overcome hierarchical, organisational, dualistic temptations in order to prioritise the 'movement of women as the people of God.'[213] Natalie Watson further develops this concept of women-centred ecclesiastical structures as places where it is possible to cope with ambivalence. The church may have been a location of 'institutional injustice'[214] towards women, but it has also allowed female discourses of faith and spirituality to be developed, it has been a place where women have met one another and, despite power imbalances, have met in community with men. For Watson, feminist ecclesiology turns a critical eye upon the church in order to ask if current patterns and structures really address the needs of half of the population, if it can be a place of transformation and empowerment for women as well as for men, and if church can be defined as community rather than as authority.

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[210] Fiorenza wishes to make clear by her use of the term 'wo/men' the 'kyriarchal' systems of domination which structure most human relationships, where gender is only one factor in the oppression of marginalised people.
[211] Fiorenza, 1999 p.189
[212] Fiorenza, 1998 p.3
[213] Fiorenza, 1998 p.203
[214] Watson, 2002 p.2

Watson suggests that feminist understandings demand that exploitative structures within the church are investigated so that they might be constructively revisioned into a space which welcomes diversity and enables women to recognise themselves as part of the body of Christ. Ecclesiology, she believes, should be based upon narratives, the telling and retellings of 'the multiple and diverse stories of women,'[215] ordination, though to be treated with suspicion because it creates divisions based upon hierarchies, should be sought by women as a means of subverting the current order, and sacramental expressions should celebrate human embodiment. Although Watson's vision of an inclusive and contextually-based living out of faith, hospitality and justice is based upon the transformation of existing church structures rather than on Ruether's separatist women-church, her description of feminist ecclesiology does not adequately address the issues facing those called to ordination within the institutional framework of the Church of England, where any desire for change must be balanced against respect for tradition, the calling to ministry within a particular expression of theology, and historic understandings of doctrine and practice.

Feminist theologies can suggest helpful and constructive suggestions for engaging with questions of faith and with women's relationships to institutional expressions of church. Although the starting-point for feminist theology must necessarily be the experiences of women and the insistence that whatever

[215] Watson, 2002 p.14

denies their full humanity is not of God,[216] strategic approaches to issues of gender and exclusion, combined with the desire to build religious communities which are representative of *all* members rather than reflecting predominantly male viewpoints, can be of value to women and men who wish to see true mutuality and openness between people of shared faith. However, feminist theologies can also be dangerously disruptive. Because they challenge deeply-held ideological and spiritual understandings, suggesting that, in traditional Anglican terms, the entire foundation of scripture, reason and tradition has been biased towards the experiences of one dominant group within society (and that the suppression of any ethical objections to this standpoint has been by claiming their sanctioning by God),[217] they demand the complete re-imagining of how Christian faith is to be expressed, internalised and lived out. They suggest that the 'father-identified'[218] Church might, in fact, have been mistaken in its exclusive use of androcentric language and symbolism. Marcella Althaus-Reid, who calls her feminist liberation theology 'indecent,' states bleakly that feminist theologies must lead to 'ethical betrayals' and rejection of all that helps to support 'the structures of patriarchal sin.'[219]

It is as difficult, within the bounds of a faith that asks its adherents both to care for the oppressed and to love their enemies, to initiate action that will inevitably

[216] 'Whatever denies, diminishes or distorts the full humanity of women is…not redemptive.' Ruether, 2002 p.15
[217] Daphne Hampson, in 'On Autonomy and Heteronomy' claims that Christianity always admits the possibility that the ethical may have to be sacrificed to obedience. Hampson, 1996 p.10
[218] Graham, 1995 p.36
[219] Althaus-Reid, 2004 p.3

cause pain and confusion to those whose religious foundations are being challenged, as it is to suffer the hurt and indignity of perpetual exclusion. There is another warning too; feminist anthropologist Suzanne Campbell-Jones points out that in Church and secular history, those who have rebelled against dominant authorities (she identifies figures as diverse as St Thérèse of Lisieux and popular entertainers) have been controlled by giving them a limited degree of approval (sainthood or honours). They are thereby brought into the institutional fold and their disruptive potential is much reduced, but their status remains at an honorary level, due only to their retaining official favour.[220] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argued from a Roman Catholic point of view that women should not accept ordination to the 'lower ranks of the hierarchy' before they were accepted into the fullness of power and priesthood demonstrated by the episcopate.[221] Continuing arguments within the Church of England about the possibility of making women bishops, often underpinned by the limitations on their ministry enforced by the Act of Synod, suggest that she might have been right.

The work of feminist scholars and theologians suggests that practice, power and possibility are all closely woven together into the fabric of the institution of the Church. Maintaining a feminist approach to the study of those entering priesthood requires that inequalities are questioned, and conventional practices and understandings examined to see whether they contribute to well-being or to

[220] Cambell-Jones, 1979 p.56
[221] Fiorenza, 1998 p.15

the creation of unjust situations. Personal stories give validity to the individuals telling tales of their experiences, and also reveal information about identity and how it is shaped. Although it is necessary to acknowledge the influence of particular cultural, sociological and historical settings on what is generally understood as 'truth,' and to reject an assumption that individual understandings and experiences are necessarily representative of the beliefs or experiences of others, investigation may reveal that stories demonstrate a wider pattern of interconnectedness or common practice. They also shed light onto how those called to ministry gain information about their calling; it may be that external influences and personal understandings are as significant in shaping identity, expectations and practice as any formal training or teaching offered by the Church.

As this study aims to examine uncertainty amongst newly-ordained clergy, it is vital that the methodology employed enables information to be gathered in a sensitive and careful manner. Feminist insistence that as far as possible, relationships between researcher and participant allow mutual learning to take place (rather than placing the researcher in a dominant position as 'expert'), and that research should advocate change rather than simply acquiring knowledge for its own sake, also demands an approach which is both reflective and reflexive; it must be anticipated that the research process will change my understandings as well as hoping that it will inform the Church and those participating in the research project. The key observation that some individuals

struggle to integrate person and priesthood, with attendant damage to their own self-understandings, the reputation of the Church, and the well-being of those they are sent to serve, makes it clear that all those involved in the project will be asked to make themselves vulnerable. That includes myself. The methodological approach employed must enable the slow, careful, teasing out of information, whilst retaining openness to what might be discovered.

Creating a research design

When first considering the fundamental issues underlying this research, I believed it possible that social and cultural influences could be as significant as theological understandings in affecting the way in which women and men approach ordination in the Church of England. I also suspected that the experience of training for ordained ministry in the company of others, reflection on the selection and training process, and the experience of beginning ordained ministry would shape, influence and at times even threaten the images that ordinands and new clergy hold about themselves and their calling. This demanded a qualitative, rather than quantitative, approach to research. By gathering together a small research group and conducting repeated in-depth interviews over a period of four years, I hoped that it would be possible to give due attention to the way in which individuals interpreted their own circumstances and theologies, whilst investigating whether the stories I heard fitted into existing critical theoretical frameworks. Through speaking to research participants at

annual intervals, it should be possible to recognise changes in understanding, and track the way in which priestly identities are developed, as well as marking particularly significant moments. The purpose of the research would be two-fold, to allow participants to tell their stories ('hearing them into speech'), in order to encourage them to reflect upon their ministries; and to draw conclusions from their experiences that could inform the future practice of the Church. My principal interest was in whether the Church adequately prepares people for priesthood; underlying this is a desire to discover how individuals can be better supported as they enter ordained ministry, and how strategies and practices can be developed to sustain their vocations.

Marshall and Rossman recognise qualitative research as studying the social behaviour of individuals, and investigating the way in which moments of interaction with others are understood. They point out that qualitative research needs to be flexible in its approach, as the process of conducting the research involves continual creative interaction between the researcher and participants in the study. In their secular perspective, they describe qualitative inquiry as an unfolding relationship between researcher and participant; I imagine the research interviews in this project, which are rooted in Christian understanding, to be not a two-way, but a three-way interactive process involving guided theological reflection as well as conversation about experiences and circumstances. Whilst secular qualitative research focuses on the relationship between researcher and participant (with the focus firmly on the subjective

viewpoint of the participant rather than the desired outcome of the researcher),[222] it is impossible, when investigating understandings of vocation and ministry, to ignore participants' understandings of the presence of God in their lives and at the heart of their actions. When talking to ordinands and ministers about their stories of faith, God is always a third person in the conversation.

Both feminist theoretical practice and qualitative research practices give particular emphasis to personal narratives as a way of validating the individual who is being listened to, and investigating unique and representative human experiences. Swinton and Mowat point out that religious and theological understandings are traditionally expressed through the medium of story-telling, which make techniques of narrative analysis ideal for practical theology.[223] However, the way in which the Church demands of its ministers that they repeatedly tell and interpret their faith story means that caution is needed when attempting to draw conclusions from these stories. The fact that foundational faith narratives – the stirring of vocation, initial recognition of Christian belief – will already have been told and retold many times, leads to the likelihood that they will have been unconsciously rehearsed and adapted during their telling. Whilst it is vital to respect the deeply personal, revelatory nature of these stories, they must at the same time be gently challenged in order to find the messy realities that lie behind the polished narrative. Researchers have recognised

[222] Marshall and Rossman, 1999 p.110
[223] Swinton and Mowat, 2006 p.31

that in the interview process there is always a possibility that interviewees, perhaps unconsciously, try to tell the story that they believe the listener wants to hear (Smith and Watson refer to the 'imposed system' of location, framework and social relationship that influences the kinds of stories that are told in particular circumstances,[224] and Gilmore identifies autobiographical stories as being structured by external discourses[225]), and the experiences narrated by ordinands or ordained clergy are particularly vulnerable to this temptation to edit the truth. Each narrative reflects the knowledge that individuals speak not just on their own behalf, but as representatives of their Church, their faith community and their God.

Feminist scholarship has long contended that individual lives are worthy of acknowledgement and examination. Critical analysis of 'the practical and the everyday'[226] can shed light on the complex negotiations of power, authority and expectation that underpin most human interactions, whilst simultaneously giving validity to the uniqueness of each person and their experiences. (The value of giving voice to 'ordinary' people now underpins many other forms of scholarship; Richard Rymarz, for example, describes how life-story narratives, used in adult theological education, changed the tenor of the classroom 'from passivity to one where the learners were much more engaged.'[227]) When conducted within a

[224] Smith and Watson, 1996 pp.10-12
[225] Gilmore, 1994 p.xiv: 'Autobiography is positioned within discourses that construct truth, identity and power, and these discourses produce a gendered subject.'
[226] Groenhout and Bower, 2003 p.2
[227] Richard M Rymarz, 'Using Life-Story Narratives in Adult Theological Education,' *JATE* 6:1, 2009 p.33

Christian framework, where the Incarnation emphasises the value of embodied human experience, apparently secular investigation is also faith-led reflection: the personal becomes theological as well as political. Personal stories, however, can easily turn from autobiographies into biomythographies;[228] their value in this context resides in the way in which they can shed light on the development of an identity guided and bounded by faith, and in the transformative potential of recognising commonly held experiences and understandings. Feminist theorists have often recognised the political implications of personal experience;[229] whilst retaining an interrogative suspicion towards the idealised or subjective undertones of each person's story, it should be possible to discover the way in which the apparently normal and quotidian helps to sustain ideological and formational development.

The research group

As the process of training for ordination is such an intense and intentionally 'formative' experience, it was considered vital to have very early contact with ordinands. For reasons of practicality, the bulk of research interviews were conducted within one diocese, but care was taken to reach as widely representative a selection of ordinands as possible. Three residential training colleges were asked if they would agree to my contacting students, and although one college decided not to participate in the project, contact was made

[228] Gilmore, 1994 p.28
[229] See for example Julia Swindells in 'Autobiography and the Politics of 'The Personal'' in Swindells, 1995 p.205

with students self-identifying, or attending colleges that identified predominantly as Anglo-Catholic, Evangelical or Liberal Catholic. Permission was also given to contact ordinands training part-time on a local course, many of whom were older than the typical student in residence at a training college, and the majority of whom were expecting to serve as non-stipendiary priests. The members of the research group ranged in age from the mid-twenties to the early-sixties, some were new to theological study whilst others were studying at postgraduate level, they came from dioceses all over the country and were in most cases planning to return to their sending diocese to serve their title post. Some were single, some married, some divorced, and there was a roughly equal division between male and female candidates. Some were fully resident in college, some were 'weekly boarders' who returned to homes and families at the weekend, some lived elsewhere and travelled daily into theological college, and some trained part-time, combining weekly lectures with some residential weekends and a residential summer school. One participant had come from an overseas diocese, and expected to return to that diocese to be ordained. All of them had been selected as having the potential to be ordained into the priestly ministry, either as stipendiary or non-stipendiary (self-supporting) ministers,[230] and all had, in order to enter training, been 'sponsored' by a Diocesan bishop. For most candidates that meant that their training costs would be covered by their sending diocese,[231] that their bishop would receive regular reports on their progress and

[230] The introduction of a new category of 'pioneer ministers' came after the beginning of this study.
[231] Some students, particularly those training for non-stipendiary posts and close to the upper age limit, pay for their own training.

make final recommendations as to their suitability for ordination, and that they would either be offered a training position (a ‘title post’) as a curate in their sending diocese or would be ‘released’ to seek a title post elsewhere.

Ethical permission was obtained from the university department overseeing this study, and appointments made to visit colleges and course locations in order to address the whole year group of new ordinands within the first three weeks of their initial ministerial training. This gave the opportunity to explain the aims and structure of the research project, to make myself available to answer any questions or concerns, and to begin to develop relationships based upon trust and mutual respect. As the interview process depends on the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, this face-to face contact was extremely important in allowing the ordinands to make informed decisions about their potential participation. It was important to stress the confidential nature of all interview material, and to make clear the ethical framework of the study (such as allowing withdrawal from the project at any time) as well as allowing time for ordinands to make a measured choice on whether or not they wished to take part. To this end, each person was given a letter restating the aims of the project, setting out the commitment requested (an interview lasting for about one hour at yearly intervals throughout training) and inviting them to signal their willingness to participate by filling in a slip and returning it to me. This letter can be found at Annexe A. Although I recognised that the commitment asked of the participants in the project, at a time when they were both embarking on what

promised to be a demanding course of study and grappling with issues related to their new identity as potential clergy, meant that many students would feel too vulnerable, uncertain or overburdened to take part, there was a good response which produced a core research group of seventeen ordinands. That group was at times supplemented by interviews with deacons and priests already in parishes, but experiencing significant transition points. In total, forty-one in-depth interviews were conducted over a period of four years, supplemented by occasional emails and telephone conversations, with no-one choosing to deliberately withdraw from the project. In fact, it was notable that at the conclusion of interviews, most participants expressed their gratitude that the interview itself had encouraged guided reflection on their experiences and understandings and had been, in some way, both helpful and therapeutic.

There were some risks associated with creating a self-selected group of research participants. Psychological studies have suggested that the kinds of people who volunteer to take part in studies are different from those who are not keen to volunteer: they tend to be well-educated and confident in their academic abilities, they enjoy social contact, and they actively seek the approval of others.[232] Those who were more insecure about their social abilities, their intellectual achievements or their vocation were less likely to take part. Students were approached very early in their training, because this allowed interview contact before the influences of the training system and the beliefs of other ordinands began to impact significantly on their self-identities. However, this

[232] Fiske, 2004 p.53

meant that some people who might have had valuable contributions to make were reluctant to commit themselves to the project before they had a firmer idea of how well they would be able to cope with the demands of training, and whether or not they trusted themselves to be vulnerable in front of a representative of the Church. (It should be noted though that a few participants in the study contacted me in their second year of training, having heard of the project and wishing to contribute to it.) It was possible too that the personal approach to ordinands meant that their decisions were influenced by instinctive reactions – whether they felt that I appeared to be approachable and trustworthy – rather than their attitude to the research itself, and that similarly I might be biased towards encouraging, even at a subliminal level, those candidates I believed to be sympathetic to my suppositions about the research, or likely to be of particular interest.[233] It was also possible that there could be a more cynical motive in taking part; new ordinands might well believe that their every move is being monitored by the staff who are responsible for their training and writing reports on their progress, and that willingness to offer support to an academic project which aimed to be of benefit to the Church could earn them approval.

Weighed against these factors was the belief that a willing participant is more likely to fully engage with the research process than someone who has to be persuaded to take part. Theorists investigating auto/biographical writings have emphasised the way in which personal narratives are 'translated' by both writer

[233] Elisabeth Young-Bruehl points out that biographers tend towards investigating people who are like them, even if they are not aware of this tendency. It is likely that the research process follows a similar path. Young-Bruehl, 1998 p.21

and reader into identities that match our own experiences, and that autobiographical story-telling is always dialogical.[234] If the relationship between researcher and participant can be as comfortable as possible even before the interview process begins, then this is likely to be of benefit to both parties; the maximum amount of information will be gained without the need for the researcher to probe to the extent that the interview might reflect the researcher's questions rather than the participant's understandings. Because the interview process searches for the inner kernel of truth that grows from personal verbal expression, it has similarities to religious confession, and therefore demands a high degree of trust that confidences will be respected. To talk to another at a deep level about identity and faith is to make oneself particularly vulnerable; a good relationship between participant and researcher recognises this vulnerability and allows the safe 'holding' both of the individual participants in the study, and of the truths that they tell.

The interview process

Research interviews utilised a semi-structured format, where simple 'open' questions were used to initiate conversation. As interviews were to take place annually, from the first weeks at theological college and in subsequent years in training, into curacies as deacons and after ordaining as priests, three different sets of questions were developed, each repeating some questions in order to track changed or developed understandings, but including some questions

[234] Smith and Watson, 1996 p.9

specific to the particular situation (i.e. how the training process was perceived, or how different it felt to be ordained as a priest rather than a deacon). These questions were refined after the first pilot interviews, and are included at Annexe B. Ethical protocols were developed that ensured that participants gave fully informed consent, that confidentiality would be maintained by anonymising interview material and storing it in a secure location, and that I remained aware of any potential conflicts of interest. The supervisor of my research project had a teaching role within the diocese from which most of my participants were drawn, so it was important to ensure that a clear division was drawn between professional and supervision duties, and to make it explicit to all participants that their interviews, without their names attached, would be seen by all members of the research team, including my supervisor. No participants chose to withdraw at this stage.

Although when I began the project I was working as a curate, during the course of research I took up a post as Chaplain to the Diocesan Bishop. Again, no participants chose to withdraw from the study at this point, having been reassured that their participation would continue to be confidential and was part of research which was not funded by the Diocese so would remain separate from my work responsibilities. I felt, however, that it was important to be aware that there was a possibility that the interview process could be manipulated by participants in the hope that information might be passed on to the Bishop or the Diocese. Although I remained scrupulous in separating research from my duties

as Chaplain, it was noticeable that a small number of people approached me after my appointment to the Bishop's staff and expressed a desire to participate in the project. This could have simply been due to increased visibility and wider contact with deacons and priests around the Diocese, but care needed to be taken to maintain a suspicious hermeneutic, considering the possible motives behind particular elements of discussion and my own lack of neutrality within the situation. A statement of ethical protocol was read out to respondents before conducting each interview, and their written agreement to participation in the study was obtained. This document can be found at Annexe C.

The interview process itself consisted of a face-to-face discussion in a location of the participant's choosing. This was usually a private room in college or in the interviewee's home, although some people chose to come to my home or office or to meet in neutral territory such as a coffee shop (this was often the precursor to the raising of sensitive issues). It was hoped that by leaving the choice of location to the participant, they would feel relaxed and confident enough to fully commit to the interview process, whilst ensuring that finding time out of busy working days was made as simple as possible so that the maximum number of interviews could be obtained. Interviewees were reminded of the research protocols, particularly that they were free to refuse to answer any questions or to withdraw from the project at any time, and were told that a full transcript of the interview would be sent to them so that they had a record of what was discussed, and the opportunity to correct any errors or to make additional points.

The interview was recorded (with permission) onto a digital voice recorder and subsequently transcribed in full, with notes made of verbal signals such as coughs, hesitations or long pauses. I felt it essential to transcribe each interview myself rather than employing a typist, in order both to preserve the confidentiality of the material and also to ensure accuracy. Transcription took place as soon as possible after each interview so that I had a clear memory of the discussion, and participants were sent a copy (by post or email, depending on their preference) straight away.

The transcription process intentionally kept the balance of power between researcher and participant as equal as possible, in alliance with feminist concerns about structures of authority and interest in valuing individuals, and ensured that the research interview itself was only one step in gathering information. Participants were thereby given time to reflect upon what they had discussed, were encouraged to correct any errors of transcription or understanding, and were given permission to return to the discussion of contentious or complex points at a later date by requesting further meetings, or by contacting me by telephone, post or email. In this way, interview material served both as the collection of information that was as accurate a reflection as possible of the interviewee's thoughts at that time, and as the initiation of an investigative and reflective dialogue between the researcher and the participant. Some respondents were surprised by what the transcript revealed about their thoughts, and rewrote large passages; often changing what they had said to

reflect what they might have written if asked to produce an essay on the subject rather than in the immediacy of conversation. In such cases the revised transcript was kept alongside the original interview notes so that the development (or self-censorship) of their thoughts could be traced and considered.

In order to avoid 'leading' the interview, questions were designed to be short, simple and straightforward, requiring the minimum of prompting or intervention from the researcher.[235] If further detail was sought, this was obtained in the main by non-verbal clues such as questioning looks or silence. In a few cases it was necessary to make more direct interventions to ensure clarification or to encourage further discussion on a particular topic, but these were based upon open questions and avoided eliciting a particular response. Interviews typically lasted for about one hour, although in a few cases they were shorter than this (though rarely taking less than 40 minutes) and sometimes lasted for up to two hours. A small sample of a typical interview transcript can be found at Appendix D.

Analysis and theoretical engagement

At the beginning of the research period, I felt it vital to remain open to what might be discovered through the interview process, rather than immediately

[235] Robson states that depth interviews should leave the respondent largely 'free to say whatever they like on the broad topic of the interview, with minimal prompting from the researcher.' Robson, 2002 p.270

shaping expectations and results to fit a pre-existing theoretical framework. Indeed, it has been pointed out that in qualitative research, the things that are often of most interest are those things that initially seem to be 'unremarkable'.[236] I therefore determined to adopt a 'grounded theory' approach in order to retain flexibility to respond to the disclosures and understandings that unfold over a period of time. This involves setting aside any assumptions about what the study might show, and developing theory only as research data is collected. It is of course impossible to completely remove one's theoretical hopes and expectations from the design process and some critics describe the possibility of grounded theory as 'unrealistic,[237] but its very provisionality allows the use of a variety of different theoretical approaches in order to fully investigate the research material and value the insights of those taking part in the interview process.

The material gathered during interview was subjected to analysis using a variety of academic theoretical approaches. Feminist techniques of 'resistant reading' were applied to the interview material, questioning not just what was said but how it was expressed, being aware of silences and avoidance, and contemplating the unspoken assumptions that lay behind what was made explicit. Insights from psychological theory were used to consider how the stories that are told about peoples' lives and the way in which they are understood may be a product of personal experience, but are defined by socially

[236] Silverman, 2005 p.300
[237] Robson, 2002 p.63

mediated constructions of knowledge. Gender issues were investigated by the application of feminist theories about gender as socially constructed and maintained and by psychology's understanding of masculine and feminine ways of relating to individuals and institutions. What does it mean for women and men when a traditionally male institution, the priesthood, admits women to its membership whilst allowing the maintenance of separatist positions? How is priesthood to be expressed and internalised with any degree of commonality if Chodorow's assertion is correct that female gender identity, defined by attachment, is threatened by separation, and male gender identity, defined by separation, is threatened by intimacy?[238] It was noted that various studies have suggested that clergy in the Church of England do not fit standard gendered behaviour patterns, with one study claiming that expected behaviours such as emotional stability, sensitivity and confidence are actually reversed amongst male and female clergy,[239] so care was taken to maintain a hermeneutic of suspicion about theoretical claims as well as about what was expressed during interview.

As the research process of examining people over a period of several years owes a debt to ethnography, techniques developed by ethnographers and anthropologists were applied to the material gathered, and to the research process itself. Robson points out that as an 'insider' conducting research, the

[238] Gilligan, 1982 p.8
[239] Francis, 2005 p.52

group under investigation needs to be treated as 'anthropologically strange'[240] in order to reveal one's own presuppositions, and Coffey describes how the construction of identity continues after, as well as during, fieldwork – for the researcher as well as for those whose lives are subject to analysis.[241] To engage in such a study is to accept that the process of research has the potential to change lives. It should not be undertaken lightly.

In his investigation into the lives of American Roman Catholic priests with twenty years post-ordination experience, Raymond Hedin concluded that despite frustrations and loneliness, those men who remained in active ministry were on the whole happy. They were, however, inclined to interpret their priesthood in their own terms rather than accepting the traditional definitions of the Church.[242] Whilst Hedin's research traces a fascinating progression from pre-Vatican II seminary training to post-twentieth century parish ministry tainted by the sexual abuse crisis and grappling with changes in culture and society, it examines men (and of course only men) who chose to join a church with clearly stated dogmas and expectations. Although his study group had on the whole come to terms with institutional failings, they now tended to view the Church as the means of facilitating their pastoral relationships rather than as a source of meaning and spiritual authority. Safe and clearly defined boundaries seemed for Hedin's study group to allow the exploration of new means of living out their vocation to priesthood and relating to their parishioners. Expressions of sexuality and

[240] Robson, 2002 p.188
[241] Coffey, 1999 p.136
[242] Hedin, 2003 p.194

bodiliness had to be worked through in the context of their vocation, and although some men found it impossible to reconcile their longing for intimacy with the demands of the Roman Catholic Church and resigned their Orders, for those who stayed, celibate pastoral relationships became a source of joy and fulfilment.

Feminist body theology, in contrast, asks questions about the way in which patriarchal structures within religious institutions and wider society can be particularly difficult for women. Christian history has repeatedly found the female body to be a source of sin and temptation, and many of the reservations expressed about the ordination of women in the Church of England revolved around distaste at the thought of a pregnant or menstruating woman presiding at the altar. Body theologians challenge us to find ways to celebrate our embodiment and sexuality whilst recognising that sex is 'a highly constructed reality'[243] which has more to do with social power and control than with divinity. When priesthood was reserved solely for men, it was possible to maintain separatist, dualistic understandings of what it was to be human and fallible, or holy and set apart; the entry of women into ordained ministry, however contested, breaks open the possibility that the Incarnation recognises the body – *all* bodies - as 'both the site and recipient of revelation.'[244] This has implications not just for women, but for anyone who has been marginalised by the Church, including those of different sexualities, ethnic minority communities and the

[243] Lisa Isherwood, 'Sex and Body Politics: Issues for Feminist Theology' in Isherwood, 2000 p.20
[244] Isherwood and Stuart, 1998 p.11

disabled. A Church of England report on institutional racism criticised the predominantly male old boy network of the Church that made decisions based on 'business as usual' rather than on carefully prepared policies,[245] and Sara Maitland warned over twenty years ago that women who were given clerical authority would have to beware being used against other women with less conventional vocations.[246] Body theology, with its emphasis on relationality, can help to challenge the way in which distorted theologies reflect a distorted gospel, and hopes to bring about an understanding of God's power as shared, affirming, collaborative and inclusive.[247]

Methodological conclusions

Accepting the insights of both feminist theory and practical theology that knowledge begins from experience and, through analysis, leads to transformative action, I determined that any methodological decisions had to be shaped by investigation of the material gathered in interviews over the initial research period. Like the understandings of participants in the survey, methodological approaches would be likely to alter over time, as experience impacted upon expectations. Despite my desire to base the study on grounded theory, leaving open the ways in which information would be analysed, it soon became clear that the richness of the interview material demanded an approach

[245] Gordon-Carter, 2003 p.112
[246] Maitland, 1983 p.104
[247] Carter Heyward, 'Is a Self-Respecting Christian Woman an Oxymoron?' in Thatcher and Stuart, 1996 p.70

which allowed both ordered analysis and the flexibility to respond to unexpected findings. Initially reluctant to impose my own understandings on the very personal experiences of others, preferring to let their words speak for them, I began to realise that *not* to do so would be an inadequate response to the openness and honesty I had encountered.

This experience, I discovered, was mirrored by other researchers. Feminist researchers Acker, Barry and Esseveld investigated the lives of individual women in order to understand the assumptions that structure everyday experience. Theirs was an emancipatory project; through a 'dialogue between the researcher and the researched,' culminating in mutual reflection upon what had been discussed,[248] they aimed to make connections between social relations and the lives of women. However, they soon discovered that their attempt to maintain objectivity whilst trying to understand individuals' experiences led to the gathering of an unwieldy mass of research material that proved difficult to analyse:

> Our feminist commitment had led us to collect data that were difficult to analyse and had provided us with so much information that it was difficult to choose what was 'essential' at the same time that we tried to give a picture that provided a 'totality.' Our solution to this series of problems was to present a number of life histories, expressed largely in the

[248] Joan Acker, Kate Barry and Johanna Esseveld, 'Objectivity and Truth: Problems in Doing Feminist Research' in Fonow and Cook, 1991 p.140

> women's own words, to typify what we thought were particular patterns of change.[249]

Upon following this approach, they discovered that the women involved in their study *wanted* their experiences to be analysed and interpreted. In order to meet the aims of their project, it was necessary to place the life stories into a theoretical framework; they achieved this by linking women's oppression to Western capitalism.[250] The stories themselves, however interesting, needed to be ordered and subjected to critical examination if they were to initiate change.

Whilst acknowledging the tension between the desire to allow those who contribute to research to speak for themselves (a refusal to objectify the 'subject') and the expectation that academic research always has a purpose that needs to be made explicit (it must be in someone's interest, rather than merely interesting), I discovered that, as Acker, Berry and Esseveld found, research centred on life histories is in danger of presenting an overwhelming mass of complex, varied and potentially bewildering data. Although encouraged by the openness with which the individuals interviewed for this project had spoken, and their readiness to admit uncertainty and vulnerability, it became clear that it would be necessary to honour their participation by effective interpretation of the experiences of which they spoke. As initial assumptions were that progression

[249] Joan Acker, Kate Barry and Johanna Esseveld, 'Objectivity and Truth: Problems in Doing Feminist Research' in Fonow and Cook, 1991 p.143
[250] Joan Acker, Kate Barry and Johanna Esseveld, 'Objectivity and Truth: Problems in Doing Feminist Research' in Fonow and Cook, 1991 p.143

from selection, through training and into parishes would cause each individual to question their experiences and expectations, the methodology had to be able to respond in different ways as time subtly altered the focus of the men and women becoming priests. A literature review had demonstrated that existing texts do not supply satisfactory information for the creation of sustainable and coherent twenty-first century identities of priesthood; new models were likely to be created, drawn from the experiences and understandings of those currently beginning their ordained ministries.

I turned to anthropology to offer a suitably flexible and ethical methodological framework. Secular feminist ethnographers have examined cultural assumptions related to gender and sexuality;[251] worked to find points of resonance – 'similarities in human experience' - with those of different languages and cultures;[252] analysed their own ethnic and linguistic identities;[253] written movingly about the struggles of 'transgressive' women;[254] and criticised the politics of translation.[255] They have rarely, however, considered religion as anything other than an adjunct, often oppressive in its demands and assumptions, to women's lives. The tendency of anthropology to seem 'exaggeratedly resistant to the possibility of taking seriously the religious experiences of others'[256] is now being challenged. The anthropology of

[251] See for example Kessler and McKenna, *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach*
[252] Unni Wikan, 'Beyond the words: the power of resonance' in Berg, 1993 p.186
[253] See for example Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderland/La Frontera: the new Mestiza*
[254] Behar, 1993 p.276
[255] See for example Gayatri Spivak
[256] Cannell, 2006 p.3

Christianity, although still an underrepresented discipline, seeks to redress this balance.

Joel Robbins describes the anthropology of Christianity as a 'community of scholarship in which those who study Christian societies formulate common problems, read each other's works, and recognise themselves as contributors to a coherent body of research.'[257] The parallels with practical theology, which insists that talk about God has to begin with the specific realities of people's lives, are clear. Robbins theorises that the relative lack of research in this field reflects both the focus of anthropology on difference, and also the historical lack of interest shown towards Christianity and Christian cultures by ethnographers and anthropologists.[258] Most interestingly, Robbins identifies the way in which radical change is at the heart of Christian faith. The bursting in of Christ to the world, changing it for ever, offers the possibility of personal transformation and subsequent salvation to each believer. Whilst conventional anthropological thought accepts that cultures are based around tradition and continuity, Christianity insists upon *discontinuity*; the eschatological necessity of making breaks with the past, the transformation of life and the identification of the Christian community of believers as deliberately counter-cultural. Robbins (who tends to assume that the most clearly identifiable form of Christianity is

[257] Joel Robbins, 'Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture: Belief, Time, and the Anthropology of Christianity' in *Current Anthropology* vol 48 no 1, p.5
[258] Joel Robbins, 'Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture: Belief, Time, and the Anthropology of Christianity' in *Current Anthropology* vol 48 no 1, p.6. Robbins advances several possible reasons for this neglect, including scepticism, scientific rationalism and a dismissal of the notion of conversion.

Protestant and evangelical in character)[259] describes conversion as 'always an event, a rupture in the time line of a person's life that cleaves it into a before and after between which there is a moment of disconnection.'[260]

Although Robbins pictures a particular kind of faith as normative, one based predominantly on the evangelical transformation from non-believer to active Christian, his thesis holds when applied to catholic, sacramentally-focused Christians and to those brought up within households or societies where Christianity is accepted as a cultural norm, but the practice of that faith has been weak. In order to become a Christian, individuals must make a personal confession of faith (or as infants, have that confession made on their behalf at baptism) and accept that God, through Christ and the Holy Spirit, will work in them. Everything before that moment is swept away, and they are, in a real sense, a 'new creation.'[261] Christianity also requires not just that one moment of radical conversion, but continual conversion of life, where the acknowledgement of human frailty is balanced against the assurance of the forgiveness of sin. The believer is encouraged to turn away from the mistakes of the past and towards the hope of a life conforming ever more closely to Christ, the 'pioneer and perfecter of our faith.'[262] In this way, each Christian is subject simultaneously to both the cultural continuity offered by membership of a

[259] He briefly acknowledges that other forms of Christianity, particularly Catholic or Orthodox, may place less emphasis on the value of radical discontinuity.
[260] Robbins, 'Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture: Belief, Time, and the Anthropology of Christianity' in *Current Anthropology* vol 48 no 1, p.11
[261] *2 Corinthians* 5:17
[262] *Hebrews* 12:2

community based upon faith and historical tradition, and the discontinuity caused by continual amendment of life and openness to the active and personal presence of the Holy Spirit. Robbins is right to draw attention to the 'rupturing of temporal continuity' in Christian conversion, where history is 'shattered' as a completely new life begins,[263] but he neglects the fact that such ruptures, albeit at a less dramatic level, happen to the believer every day.

Caroline Humphrey, following the work of the French philosopher Alain Badiou,[264] applies his identification of 'ruptures' and 'events' to anthropology and Christianity. Humphrey appreciates the way in which Badiou's theories take account of cultural, geographical and historical specificities, whilst acknowledging that 'events' cannot be measured objectively. 'Here we have a notion,' she writes, 'of how time may be divided: before the Affair (the event) and after the Affair. If the event is both revelation and catalyst, if it marks the beginning of a new time, it is made by action.'[265] Where she differs from Badiou is in her recognition that events do not only involve completely new ideas and new truths, but can be based upon the decision to choose a new position by 'leaping across what is not known – or not thought about – in a long-standing and inherited landscape of knowledge.'[266] Humphrey describes such movement

[263] Joel Robbins, 'Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture: Belief, Time, and the Anthropology of Christianity' in *Current Anthropology* vol 48 no 1, p.12
[264] See *Being and Event*
[265] Caroline Humphrey, 'Reassembling individual subjects: Events and decisions in troubled times' in *Anthropological Theory* 2008: 8 p.360
[266] Caroline Humphrey, 'Reassembling individual subjects: Events and decisions in troubled times' in *Anthropological Theory* 2008: 8 p.364

as a 'decision-event.'[267] Like Badiou, she accepts that events can have a radically transformative effect upon individuals and their self-understanding, but she extends understanding of what constitutes an 'event' from Badiou's 'rupture' (with its implied dramatic context) to less revelatory circumstances that eventually lead to a moment where a decision is taken that will have lasting consequences. For Humphrey, it is likely that a 'decision-event' will arise out of 'a sequence of happenings'[268] and that individuals are responsible, at least in part, for the way in which they respond to particular circumstances.

Christianity insists not only that radical change happens, but that such change can be beneficial. Those who practice an active Christian faith are, therefore, likely to respond to the internal and external promptings that can lead to undertaking life-changing events whilst (perhaps subconsciously) expecting that if these arise from their Christianity they will, in the end, have a positive result.[269] When examining the stories told by the participants in this research project, it became clear that each person had, at some time during the acceptance of vocation and the process leading up to ordination and work in a parish, experienced at least one moment that could be described as an 'event.' Following Robbins, I recognise these as moments of profound discontinuity, where not only the former way of living, but also the assumptions and identity

[267] Caroline Humphrey, 'Reassembling individual subjects: Events and decisions in troubled times' in *Anthropological Theory* 2008: 8 p.360
[268] Caroline Humphrey, 'Reassembling individual subjects: Events and decisions in troubled times' in *Anthropological Theory* 2008: 8 p.375
[269] Coleman describes an incident where the serious injury of a charismatic Christian in a car crash was taken 'as an indication that her work was sufficiently powerful to attract attention from the devil.' Simon Coleman, 'Materialising the Self: Words and Gifts in the Construction of Charismatic Protestant Identity' in Cannell, 2006 p.169

that underlies it, is broken apart. Combining Badiou's and Humphrey's understandings, I consider both those events driven by external forces (Badiou's 'ruptures') and those involving deliberate actions on the part of the individual (Humphrey's 'decision-events').

Anthropologists Tomlinson and Engleke suggest that meaning, even in a Christian context, is not fixed, but is a 'process and potential fraught with uncertainty and contestation.'[270] I had no initial desire to focus my research on moments of apparent failure – I wanted to see people flourishing in ministry - but such moments, where meaning is at its most problematic, proved to be particularly revealing. Times of difficulty and crisis threw into sharp relief the attitudes held by, and the influences upon, the individual. Some found their faith and their vocation strengthened and affirmed by working through difficulties, whilst others struggled to cope with the possibility of meaninglessness. Events that lead to periods of discontinuity form a framework within which to examine life-narratives and consider how the Christian community (which can involve informal support networks as well as formal church and institutional structures) is placed in relation to the individual in crisis.

Both practical theology and Christian anthropology desire the development of appropriate interpretive frameworks within which life experiences can be considered and meaning discovered. My feminist convictions insist that any

[270] Matt Tomlinson and Matthew Engelke, 'Meaning, Anthropology, Christianity' in Engelke and Tomlinson, 2007 p.2

such structures should not be merely theoretical, or serve to limit and oppress, but should encourage the transformation of unjust situations, and affirm the value of individual lives. To this end, the stories told by the women and men participating in this project will be interpreted in ways which reflect the paths taken from their initial calling to ordained ministry into living and working as parish priests. Although identification of the categories earlier identified as foundational in existing literature about priesthood suggested a thematic approach to data analysis, this felt too simplistic a response to a complex combination of experiences, expectations and gradually developing understandings amongst the research group. Assumptions that might seem obvious at an early stage of the process can change radically over time. Instead, trusting in the metaphor of the journey, the chronologically-ordered experiences of the research group will be investigated in order to discover what the participants believe is happening, what influences them, and what strategies they develop in order to survive and to flourish. What unfolds and becomes apparent along the route, and how circumstances and learning help to shape responses over time, are crucial to understanding and interpreting the experiences of the research group. Hence the early stages of the exploration of vocation will be considered alongside the 'ideal lives' model of images of priesthood; the process of vocational guidance and selection for training as 'personal stories;' the 'formation' of priestly identities in training institutions as 'investigative texts;' the integration of theory with experience in parish ministry as 'boundary markers;' and the liberation of discovering personally-appropriate

ways of living out vocation in a bringing-together of past experience and future hope as 'synthesis.' The methodological framework of the study retains the ability to respond to discoveries along the way, and acts as a means to create and interpret a map of the journey.

How do the men and women in my study believe their stories to fit within the networks of understanding set by their religious and institutional loyalties? Does the Church adequately prepare, support and encourage them to live out their vocations to the priesthood? How do they learn to be priests and to flourish in that calling? Insights from feminist theories underpin every element of the project, and theological reflection upon the process itself as well as its findings acknowledges God's creative presence at the heart of all human endeavour. But more than this, God acts as 'magnetic north' for those travelling by faith into an unknown landscape. Each of my research interviews ended with the question, 'where is God in all this?' That question has been at the forefront of my thought throughout the research project.

Chapter 3

Inspiration

Introduction

Journeys always begin with desire and intention, each traveller having both a reason to set out and a perceived destination in mind. If the journey is towards priesthood, then in order for men and women to pursue their calling they must first possess two things: an active, responsive Christian faith and a belief that priesthood is something that is congruent with their skills, abilities and desires. They need to be inspired to set out, and to have confidence that the journey is not beyond their capabilities. How the faith of those seeking ordination was originally 'caught or taught,' the ways in which their Christianity has been shaped and developed (the process described as 'faithing'[271] by Nicola Slee) and the internal images they hold of what and who clergy *are*, have the potential to influence the ways in which they approach their travels. How they choose to express their faith, the ways in which they develop their theological and pastoral understandings, their views on ministry, leadership and sacrament, and the ways in which they relate to others and to God, will shape their hopes and their

[271] Slee, 2004 p.61: 'I prefer to use the verbal form 'faithing', rather than the noun 'faith', to highlight the dynamic and active process of meaning-making with which we are concerned in the study of faith development.'

plans. They might not realise that they have been affected (for good or bad) by their experiences of church and by the images of priesthood that they have formerly encountered, but without models to guide them, it is unlikely that they would have the expectation of feasibility that encourages them to pursue a vocation to priesthood. As the first chapter showed, these models, or 'ideal lives,' might not always present the most realistic depictions of contemporary ordained ministry, but they are crucial elements of internalising a priestly identity.

Each individual will identify different factors that led them towards their vocation, but the concept will not only inspire them towards a life of service, it will also create an expectation that their lives will be more fulfilled and their work more satisfying than would be otherwise possible. Psychologists Dik and Duffy understand vocation as leading individuals 'toward some kind of personally fulfilling and/or socially significant engagement within the work role.'[272] If these expectations are not met (or if they are not acknowledged and contextualised by the Church), there is considerable potential not only for disappointment, but also for damage to the very faith that led to self-offering. Yet after the initial selection process, during which aspiring Anglican priests will meet with vocations advisors or directors of ordinands and will be encouraged to tell in detail how they came to faith and recognised their priestly vocations, little attention is paid to faith

[272] Dik and Duffy, 'Calling and Vocation at Work: Definitions and Prospects for Research and Practice' in *The Counselling Psychologist* 2009, vol 37, p.427

histories or the expectations that they might have engendered. It is enough that the *presence* of Christian faith has been examined and found sufficient.

The models of priesthood available to aspiring ordinands are similarly neglected. Although we might expect that people outside church circles will gain much of their knowledge about clerics and clericalism from the media, those putting themselves forward for ordination are expected to have more informed and realistic understandings of priesthood. Yet like anyone else, they will have been influenced by a variety of sources; they might have been inspired to follow or reject the example shown by their own parish priest, but they are also likely to have assimilated information about other ordained ministers described in academic or auto/biographical texts, portrayed in fictional accounts, or made the subject of news articles. Family and friends can have a significant impact, particularly if they are either strongly opposed to the individual following their vocation, or if they are themselves part of church structures. A good Diocesan Director of Ordinands[273] may well investigate the factors that have influenced a candidate's assumptions about ministry, but again, once considered suitable for training and eventual ordination, such background information tends to be considered irrelevant. It has the potential, however, to continue to underpin and influence future practice. 'Ideal lives,' that is, attractive models of priestly existence, whether actual or fictitious, may be an inspiration to those in the early

[273] The person responsible for overseeing the process that leads from initial enquiries about vocation through training and up to ordination, often known as the 'DDO.'

stages of exploring vocation, but there is no guarantee that following their example will lead to contentment or capability.

Inspiration and investigation

Popular models

In an increasingly secular British society, where residual affiliation to Christianity might be the default position on census returns, but active expression of faith is the province of the minority, images of priesthood portrayed in the media can have a disproportionately strong influence. Women and men recognising the stirrings of a vocation to ordained ministry will have to cope not only with their own uncertainties about what this might mean to their lives, but also with the misconceptions, prejudices and inaccuracies about priesthood promoted through film, television, newspapers, novels and other media. The justified revulsion caused by the abuse of clerical authority has led to a culture of acceptance that ordained ministers are likely to be sexual predators; experienced priests have talked about the distress caused by an underlying expectation that any single, older ordained man is a potential paedophile,[274] gay

[274] See for example *Sex, Priestly Ministry, and the Church*, Sperry, 2003, which reminds readers that the ideals underpinning ordained ministry should include 'honesty, integrity, self-surrender and transparency of character. Sperry, 2003 p.161

priests have written about being forced to 'live a lie,'[275] and academic studies have claimed, for example, that up to one-third of the clergy risk 'crossing a sexual boundary' with one of their parishioners at some point in their career, with the likelihood of such sexual misconduct rising with length of service.[276] Aggressive defenders of atheism are often treated more sympathetically than religious apologists in the British press, with intellect and faith being considered, in the minds of many, completely incompatible. Add to this the long tradition of lampooning the clergy in popular entertainment – Derek Nimmo's bumbling chaplain in radio and television's *All Gas and Gaiters* being at one end of the spectrum and Trollope's ambitious bishop Dr Proudie at the other – and it seems remarkable that anyone of competence and sensitivity would desire to be ordained.

There are, however, significant examples of a positive portrayal of priesthood in popular culture. Television's *Vicar of Dibley* may have presented a caricature of female clericalism, with the eponymous heroine more likely to be shown gorging on chocolate or fantasising about handsome parishioners than engaged in prayer or the Occasional Offices, but her kindness, her dedication to her calling and the genuine love she displayed for her parishioners went a long way to normalising the ordination of women (still a recent innovation when the long-running series of programmes was first broadcast) and demonstrating that it was

[275] 'I was a gay priest' BBC website, http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/7506291.stm accessed 18 July 2008
[276] McClintock, 2004 p.103

possible for clergy to be likable, caring and pastorally inclined. A conversation with a Diocesan Director of Ordinands revealed that many people putting themselves forward for ordination confessed that they had been encouraged by the television series, seeing the flawed but attractive model of ministry it portrayed to be much more accessible than images of priestly perfection. More recently, the television series *Rev*, which took an affectionately humorous view of the life of an inner-city male Anglican vicar, was lauded by critics and clerics alike[277] and attracted large viewing figures. It remains to be seen whether future ordinands confess that the likeability of its central character was a factor that influenced them to investigate a calling to ordained ministry.

Those believing that they are called to ordained ministry therefore have to negotiate two clichéd extremes of 'ideal lives', the authoritarian leader who has the potential to abuse and misuse religious authority, and the caring but incompetent innocent in a naughty world. Unsurprisingly, the ordinands who I first interviewed at the very beginning of their training were keen to describe the realistic and informed views of parish ministry that they held. They talked largely about their long involvement with church, of vocations being affirmed by clergy and parishioners in their parishes, and of the whole-hearted support of their family and friends. They mentioned the bishops who had recognised their potential, and the theologians whom they had studied before tentatively

[277] The Archbishop of Canterbury is reported as thinking the series 'really rather good' in its examination of 'the continuing commitment of the church to run down and challenging areas' and the Bishop of Buckingham described it as 'a noble enterprise.' Riazat Butt, 'Rev 'rather good' says Archbishop of Canterbury' http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv-and-radio/2010/aug/01/senior-church-figures-rev-bbc accessed 15 August 2010

approaching a vocations advisor. One ordinand did describe with admirable honesty the way in which he had first been inspired at the age of about seven by the portrayal of Jesus in an epic film shown on television, but he was unusual in both his background (he came from a secular career which did not look kindly on intellectual or social pretension) and his openness. On the whole, having begun the process of joining the clerical profession, research participants tended to present a measured and carefully-edited account of their understandings of what and who had influenced their desire to be ordained.

Later on, as they settled into their roles as ordinands or as ordained clergy, they began to talk about wider influences. One ordained woman even mentioned the Vicar of Dibley in a way that suggested that she was aware of possible negative implications of the image but that she was pleased by the association:

> people do use the cliché of the Vicar of Dibley with me, and I know so many women priests get offended by that, but actually I don't, because I think the fact that she's very much a parish priest is actually who I am.

Another more experienced parish priest, struggling with difficulties in her parish, confessed that even in training she did not 'understand' the Church, having been convinced by seeing a woman with a young family taking a role in church leadership that combining motherhood and ministry would be straightforward and easy. However confident ordinands seem to be about their calling, it

appears that many of them may harbour unrealistic or poorly-informed expectations about the nature of the Church and of priesthood.

Family and faith

A significant proportion of my research group had grown up with parents who were practising Christians, and had spent their formative years being involved with church groups. For them, Christian belief was unexceptional, and participation in church activities a normal part of childhood and adolescence. Matthew,[278] an overseas student and a single man in his early 30s, described his desire to seek ordination as a gradual outcome of his upbringing and experiences: 'I went to church because it was the sort of thing to do because my parents went to church.' Becoming more involved with church as a teenager, he took on responsibilities as an altar server, led intercessions in worship, helped to lead the youth group and was a member of the Parish Council. For Matthew, the desire to be ordained was not something that came as a sudden revelation, but which arose from his family's shared Christian faith, increasing participation and opportunities for leadership in his local church and intellectual investigation at university. A local priest encouraged him to consider ordination, and offered to sponsor his ministerial training at a residential college in England.

[278] To preserve confidentiality, all names of participants have been changed.

> I got to know lots of different priests from around the Diocese from the work that I was doing, and got to see different models of ministry…so I became interested in it that way, and also academically.

A second interview with Matthew a year after his entry into theological college revealed that the experience of residential training and further academic study, despite some difficulties with illness and distance from home and family, had served to strengthen and clarify his vocation:

> I've had some time at theological college, and through my academic studies, my placements and my personal development, my vocation has become – I don't want to say stronger, it's as strong as it has been – it's become clearer, it's taking shape, and I have now a better idea of what it is to be in full-time ministry as opposed to [only] a notion of that.

Matthew's childhood acceptance of faith had led apparently seamlessly towards an active participation in his local church and, guided by the encouragement of an experienced priest, towards consideration of ordination. It is noticeable that he admits that he never felt a vocation specifically to priesthood itself, but that his interest in lay leadership led into *'*God calling me personally to develop my faith more.' It was his increasing involvement in church structures, encouraged

and enabled by his family and friends, which enabled him to believe that ordained priesthood could be an appropriate response to God's calling.

A similar pattern can be discerned in Simon's description of his early life and faith. Also in his thirties, and married, he wryly commented that he met the caricature of what an Anglican curate should be, 'white, male, youngish, public school educated, Oxbridge educated,' and talked easily of the unquestioned childhood observance that led to his calling to priesthood:

> My background's entirely within the church family, I mean growing up in the church. I think there was probably the odd week or two as an adolescent where I decided not to go to church, but basically I've always been involved in church life, so in a sense it's in the blood…I think part of it [my vocation] initially was tied up with…wanting to do something worthwhile, useful.

Although Simon was reticent about discussing the reasons for some set-backs on his progression towards ordination, it became clear that all had not been as straightforward as suggested by his initial description of childhood faith, family support and a vocation to service. He had been rejected by the Bishop's Advisory Panel at his first attempt to be selected for ministerial training, and had later voluntarily withdrawn from training at a residential theological college in a different city ('it wasn't the right time for me to be ordained'). Both Matthew and

Simon expressed apparently simple stories of education in the Christian faith in the home leading to family encouragement to pursue vocation. Neither man talked about hearing a clear and urgent vocation to priesthood itself, but instead explained that their desire to do something worthwhile had combined with the expectations suggested by their Christian faith that the ultimate expression of service was priesthood.

Although recent critical attention on Christian families has tended to suggest that so-called religious values are more closely tied to social and political ideologies than to issues of theology or doctrine,[279] children brought up within a family which identifies as actively Christian will learn particular discursive and practical means of expression that relate to their family's faith (Grace Davie, amongst others, believes that religious notions are largely shaped at an early age within family settings).[280] The details of how that faith is understood and lived out will differ, and it may later be rejected or re-envisaged, but its presence during childhood development means that it has the potential to become part of the individual's history of personal identity.

Sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger theorises that religious commitment relies upon believers consciously understanding themselves as being part of a tradition of faith that reaches from the past, through the present and into the

[279] See for example, Radford Ruether, 2001 p.5 and Callum Brown 2001 p.172
[280] Davie, 1994 p.29

future. She describes this process as a 'chain of memory,'[281] in which the detail or accuracy of the invoked tradition is less important than the fact that the individual claims membership through it of a group linked by a combination of an imaginatively recalled past (which is often expressed through ritual) and a socially attested understanding. As in Hervieu-Léger's view, the role of the priest is to *control* the way in which religious memories are utilised,[282] the way in which the ordained identify their place in the lineage of the faithful – in other words, how they fit their personal histories of faith into the doctrinally- and socially-constituted system in which they are authorised to teach and lead – has implications for their professional and personal understandings of priesthood. Histories of faith, even those which may involve a degree of self-deception or creative retelling, have the capacity to shape future practice.

Not all those who grow up in faithful households find a priestly vocation easy to accept. Julia came from a low-church background, and although knowing that she 'wanted to serve' God, found that her desire to study theology and investigate her calling was discouraged by her church leadership as being unsuitable for a woman. It was only after attending an ecumenical church with a female minister, where she was able to take on a variety of responsibilities, that she found the courage to express a vocation to priesthood.

[281] Hervieu-Léger, 2000
[282] Ibid p.126. She draws a clear distinction between the 'mobilisation of memory' by the priest and by a prophet. It should be noted that her studies are rooted in the context of predominantly Roman Catholic France, and that the boundaries in England may not be so clearly drawn.

> [My vocation] was to priesthood, but I didn't admit it for a long time. I thought, oh, I'll go off and train to be a teacher…I thought I was imagining it, thinking how can I even think about being a priest, because I'm normal, very human, and I could never live up to that. So that's why [I was] waiting for other people to push me.

The unrealistic image of the priest as abnormally 'perfect' meant that Julia felt unable to meet such a standard, whilst the assumptions of her faith community about 'appropriate' gendered roles did not encourage her to take on responsibilities of teaching or leadership in church settings. Only the example of a woman already in church leadership, and the opportunity to be given responsibilities in a more welcoming church, allowed Julia to consider that she might be correctly hearing a vocation to ordination.

Difficulties with family circumstances and the impact of changes at her theological college meant that even after selection for ministerial training, Julia still struggled with the concept of vocation. She remained anxious to understand whether she had correctly heard God's calling, partly convinced that if problems were being put in her way, this could indicate that she was being shown that it was wrong for her to wish to become a priest. However, learning to cope with adversity seemed to strengthen both her desire to become ordained and her understanding of her vocation. Interviewed during her second year in training she believed that although she had not had a 'comfortable' experience,

successfully completing the first section of her training enabled her to 'feel [even] more called to ministry and more called to priesthood than I was last year.' Although, like Matthew and Simon, family-based faith had made Julia ready to listen for God to call her to service to the wider community, gendered expectations made it difficult for her to accept that her calling was to leadership and priesthood. Whilst Matthew and Simon found that the priestly role models they hoped to follow fitted neatly into their histories of faith and their theological expectations, Julia was forced to find an alternative way of entering Hervieu-Léger's 'chain of memory' by joining an ecumenical church with a female minister. Only then could she reconcile her vocation with the need to feel part of an authorised and socially-accepted tradition.

Children of the Clergy

Although there are no comprehensive studies of contemporary cohorts of men and women entering ordained ministry, a recent study by Davies and Guest found that a high number of those called to the episcopate – one fifth of their sample - are the sons of ordained priests and bishops.[283] This is on one level unsurprising; Grace Davie suggested that religiosity is 'moulded' by the situations in which people find themselves, with family patterns of religious behaviour, particularly at an early age, having a great significance.[284] It would therefore be easy for children of the clergy not only to learn that Christian faith

[283] Davies and Guest, 2007 p.32.
[284] Davie, 1994 pp.18, 21.

requires an *active* response but also to be unusually open to the possibility of a vocation to ordained ministry, having seen it lived out in practice.[285] (It is also feasible that, as one bishop confessed to Davies and Guest, family expectations and traditions can lead to the pursuing of ordination without 'any particular sense of vocation.')[286] Similarly, a significant proportion of the respondents in my study either grew up in clergy households, had parents who had lay roles in their local church (such as church wardens) or, in the case of some female ordinands, had been clergy wives before recognising their own calling to ordained ministry. Close relationships with those in church leadership (ordained and lay) can create familiarity with the institution and with the opportunities for service it offers.

For one respondent in this study, having a father who trained for the priesthood in her early teens introduced the concept of accepting vocation, but threw into question her inherited Christian faith. An act of adolescent rebellion against her father led to the rejection of Christianity and a refusal to attend church with her family. Although believing that she had a 'call to represent God,' Rebecca began to attend worship within another faith tradition and as an adult investigated the feasibility of training for leadership in that tradition. It was only when it became clear that this would be impossible unless her husband also converted, that she began to return to church and think again about her vocation

[285] Earlier studies of clergy suggested that ordinands brought up in clergy families tended to consider taking Holy Orders 'at an earlier age' than their contemporaries. Towler and Coxon, 1979 p.73
[286] Davies and Guest, 2007 p.41

('it's a story that doesn't necessarily reflect very well on me [but] it reflects well on God'). Encouraged by her vicar and her DDO, she attended a ministry selection conference, determined that she would accept their decision on her future.

> I was very calm…for me it was much more a process of recognising something internally and then having it recognised externally.

Like Julia, who worried that she was being presumptuous in desiring ordination, something she had been taught was reserved for men, Rebecca needed to have her calling (which she had so dramatically misheard) affirmed by others.

Rebecca was recommended for training, but even at theological college still questioned the process that had led her through such a circuitous route towards Christian priesthood:

> I have complicated reactions to it still, when I get the feeling that it's all entirely made up by me and at some point someone's going to catch me out…there are people for whom the church discerns, and says, you're going to go and do this, [but] for me, I've made the decision and the church has said yes, [and] for me that's an ongoing anxiety thing which is tied in with humility and anxiety about being too proud, too arrogant. I think that's quite a female thing.

Childhood faith, for her, as for many of my interviewees, led to the acceptance that the Christian life may involve being called to service. It did not guarantee that the journey towards ordination would be without incident or uncertainty.

Family histories of ministry also caused Nick, a married man in his late forties, initially to resist a calling to ordination. Describing himself as the sixth generation of his family to enter the church *('my father's a clergyman, so I was brought up in a clergy household, but so is my uncle, and my grandfather, my great uncle, my great aunt was a missionary, and my great-great grandfather a priest too'*) he worried that he might be hoping to please his father and fulfil the expectations of others rather than responding to God. Recognising his vocation came after years of having an 'awful sense' of knowing that God had plans for his life, but not knowing how to respond:

> as I came to rationalise [my resistance] over the years, I can see that very much now, it's a sense of being, 'I am a man of unclean lips,' you know, I am unworthy, and I can't possibly do this

As well as Nick's own reservations about his inability to live up to the standard set by his ancestors in ministry, he had a clear sense that his parents themselves needed to be convinced that his vocation was authentic. His long struggle to accept God's calling to ordination was as much about reassuring

them that he ‘had actually battled with something’ as about persuading himself that he was genuinely called.

It might be argued by those who have grown up in close contact with the church, particularly those whose parents were themselves members of the clergy, that they have an unusually clear understanding of the requirements of the Church, they are aware of the realities of ordained ministry, and they have invaluable lived experience of active Christian discipleship. All this may be true, although evidence from the two respondents above suggests that the children of clergy are if anything more reticent about following their vocations than other ordinands. (Davies and Guest suggested in their study that the children of bishops did not show the same level of calling to vocation as their Episcopal parents, with 12 per cent considering ordination and only 6 per cent taking holy orders. The authors theorised that this might in some cases be related to the model of the ‘ideal type’ demonstrated by their high-achieving fathers; a model they felt unable to replicate. Clergy children who idealise or greatly admire the ministry of a parent could also fit the same pattern.)[287] It is also possible that their background might lead them to assume that *all* priestly ministries will fit the model of those ‘ideal lives’ they observed throughout their most formative years, and that their life-long association with the Church will give them innate advantages in ministerial understanding and practice. As the Church, in order to survive, must maintain a credible witness in the face of a society which is

[287] Davies and Guest, 2007 p.161

becoming increasingly detached from formal religious expression,[288] it is vital that those it authorises for ordained ministry are able to use their priesthood to meet the needs of the people they serve, rather than attempting to mould the people to an outdated model of what practical priesthood involves. The patterns of ministry that clergy children observed as they grew up may have been influential in shaping their expectations, but must be balanced by experience in other settings and contexts. Like any other ordinands, clergy children must be ready to learn what it is that the Church expects of its ordained ministers, and the Church must be clear what it expects of them.

Faith and experience

For some ordinands, the most significant factor in accepting vocation is not their early life, but adult experiences of living or working alongside people already exercising forms of ministry. Sociologist Robin Gill has pointed out the 'intimate connection between formal religious participation and social identity'[289] and he and other commentators have pointed out the gulf between an increasingly secular population and those who are familiar with the culture and practice of ritualised worship. If individuals do not necessarily have the same familiarity as previous generations with religious practice, and yet are prepared to take on a position which involves not just particular duties but the potential transformation

[288] Although census figures suggest that a large proportion of British citizens still describe themselves as 'Christian,' church attendance figures show that for many people the occasional offices are their only contact with church.
[289] Robin Gill, 'The Future of Religious Participation and Belief in Britain and Beyond' in Fenn, 2004 p.280

of their entire way of life, they must in some way be convinced that it is possible for them to reconcile the paradoxical demands of task and role.

In Anglicanism, priority is given to the intervention of the Holy Spirit; the Christian tradition of prophetic revelation prioritises vocation above the recognition of an individual's gifts and abilities. Other faith traditions are less inhibited about demanding a high standard of professional and academic skills from those wishing to train for leadership positions. Uta Blohm's research into women working as ministers and rabbis recognised that Judaism, for example, explicitly expects that those choosing to become rabbis will possess and, in training and beyond, develop the skills relevant to an authority 'based on learning.'[290] The Jewish women in her study talked openly about wanting to use their abilities in an appropriate way; they had assessed that they would flourish in the role and had made a decision to complete the training necessary for them to become rabbis. Similarly, Julia Neuberger describes how she was persuaded to begin rabbinic studies because of their intellectual rigour and her desire to be 'an academic'[291] rather than because of any spiritual or pastoral calling. Yet the Church of England, whilst assessing at selection the abilities of candidates to successfully complete varying types of pre-ordination training, all of which will include some formal theological and academic study,[292] does not encourage would-be ordinands to follow a path to priesthood because they think that they have the appropriate skills. There is an assumption that if God has called, then

[290] Blohm, 2005 p.114
[291] Julia Neuberger, 'The Way Things Are' in Sheridan, 1994 p.21
[292] The types of training available will be discussed in the following chapter.

God will provide, and that too much of an emphasis on intellect or practical ability is to show mistrust in God's participation in the process. When theologians discuss the 'ministry of the whole people of God,'[293] or bishops write about ordained ministry being described by 'a sharing in Christ's servanthood and his service of the world,'[294] priority is given not to learning or competence, but to reliance on the model of Christ-like humility and the supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit.

A significant factor in deciding if priesthood is feasible can be undertaking lay work for a church, particularly if this involves being given defined areas of responsibility. Sarah, who came from a conservative evangelical church where women were not allowed to minister, had found it so difficult to reconcile her calling to ordination with the teachings of her church that she had initially persuaded her husband – a committed lay minister - to offer himself for ordained ministry. He was not recommended for selection, and when Sarah herself attended a selection panel she felt totally unprepared to justify her calling and 'froze up.' Believing that she was 'called by God' to move the family away and take up a job as a lay worker in a large church in an inner city, she grew in confidence as she led teams responsible for pastoral care and evangelism. Returning to selection she was this time recommended for training and took up a place at a residential theological college; a development that she acknowledged

[293] Croft, 1999 p.11
[294] Stephen Platten, 'The grammar of ministry and mission' in *Theology*, September/October 2010 p.354

would not have been possible without the experience she had gained in lay leadership:

> there were times when I was doing things [in the city parish] and it was really tough and I was doing it because God had called me to do it, and I might have been feeling totally paranoid, but there I was standing at the front, and I was leading worship. I'm doing whatever I'm doing because God has called me to do it, and so that is the bottom line.

Without the opportunity to exercise her gifts and to have them affirmed by a church congregation, she would have been unlikely to successfully pursue her vocation.

Although women can have particular issues related to conservative theological understandings, several men also described the importance of gaining experience that boosted their confidence. Richard came from a non-conformist background and discovered Anglican worship as a result of his musical gifts. Employed by a large Anglo-Catholic church as music director, he found himself taking on additional tasks almost by accident:

> I got to do more, both musically and in terms of their student work; leading a small Bible study group, preaching at 8am Communions, those things that if you're around for long enough you kind of get

opportunities to do,

and after a course of theological study and a serious bout of illness, accepted that he was being called to ordained ministry. David had several times rejected the notion that he had a vocation to priesthood, but after increasing lay involvement in evangelism and outreach, including leading a church plant,[295] realised that if he were to continue leading and growing the new church community, he would have to be ordained. Another ordinand, Sam, had been working in a secular setting overseas, but was asked to use his teaching skills in order to work with students at a city church. This led him to consider that he might be called to 'more traditional church-based forms of ministry' and begin the journey towards ordination.

Although from the nineteenth century onwards, Anglican clergy have been increasingly viewed as 'professionals,'[296] the emphasis given to supernaturally gifted sacredness – setting clergy apart from the laity – makes it both imprudent and impudent for would-be ordinands to openly base their vocation on assessment of their abilities in such matters as leadership, administration, theological understanding or intellectual ability. However, in order for women and men to offer themselves for priestly ordination, they must believe that God has called them to exercise priesthood (and be able to convince others that they have correctly heard that calling) whilst also having some awareness of what

[295] The formation of a worshipping community in an area where there is no formal church building or presence. Church plants often meet in existing community buildings such as schools.
[296] Russell, 1984 p.236

they understand the operation of that priesthood to involve. 'Ideal models' provided by others are not, by themselves, always sufficient to persuade them that they can step into the priestly role. They must believe that they can be 'bearers of the sacred,'[297] and also competent in the day-to-day duties of ministry. The opportunity to practice such duties in a church setting can be hugely influential in increasing their confidence both in their abilities and their vocation.

Sharing lives

Although to someone looking from outside at the multiplicity of tasks undertaken by a parish priest, it can seem impossible or unrealistic to aspire towards serving both God and the parish, those in close contact with ordained ministers – particularly their spouses – are well aware that each priestly individual is by no means perfect. They still demonstrate human fallibilities and weaknesses. Ministers' spouses also understand how individual priests balance their life and their work (with varying levels of success), recognise the types of responsibilities and tasks they carry, and know the ways in which their private and public lives intermesh. Kathleen Norris identifies the transformative nature of discovering the holy in the everyday;[298] those who know priests intimately are better equipped than most to recognise the realities that underpin a faith based upon the Incarnation.

[297] Penny Jamieson, 'Authority' in Harris and Shaw, 2004 p.121
[298] Norris, 1998 p.18, 71

Three of the women in my research group were, or had been, married to priests, and another had close family members in ministry. (Although the relatively recent period of time since the women have been ordained means that none of my research group were clergy husbands choosing to follow the example of their wives, I have no doubt that this will become more common.) Deborah had a successful secular career and management experience, and acknowledged that being married to a parish priest meant that she and her husband spent 'more time in some ways with and in the church than we do doing other things.' She had married her husband before he began his ordination training, having become a Christian herself whilst a student, so had accompanied him to a residential theological college. Whilst not considering herself to be a 'traditional vicar's wife', she had always been supportive of her husband's ministry and had, as her children had grown up, begun to take on increasing teaching and leadership roles within the parish. When she helped out with a successful parish mission, she began to consider more formal involvement:

> [I] found myself doing all sorts of things through [the mission] that I wouldn't normally have been doing, including preaching, which really wasn't my role, and getting quite positive feedback, so then I thought, well, maybe I should be doing more.

Initially considering becoming a Licensed Lay Minister (a Reader), Deborah talked about her growing vocation to several ordained friends and another clergy wife, all of whom encouraged her to think about ordained ministry. Positive reactions from her Diocesan Director of Ordinands and from her Selection Conference strengthened her calling, and although at first reluctant to consider ordination because she understood priesthood to be her husband's role, his supportiveness and recognition of her gifts enabled her to accept and follow her vocation.

Deborah considered her experience as a clergy wife to be helpful in ensuring that she was aware of the realities of living as a parish priest:

> I suppose if anything it would have put me off coming forward for ordination, but it didn't...[I understand] the sort of expectations of the parish on their clergy, the demands in terms of phone calls and knocks on the door at all times…we've been public property for so long I've forgotten what it is not to be!

There were, however, significant differences between her husband's priesthood and her approach to priestly ministry; although believing that she was called to parish ministry rather than chaplaincy, Deborah intended to carry on her secular career and limit her parish involvement until she retired to 'a sort of Sunday helping out with services kind of role.' It was unclear (perhaps even to Deborah

herself) whether this was because of the nature of her calling, because it was a way of defending her individuality, or because it would not threaten her husband's role as the principal pastor in the local community. She did not expect that ordination would alter her working life:

> because I am a Christian my secular work is different in some ways from that of some of my colleagues…I already try to support the chaplain and go to morning prayer when I can…part of what God's calling me to in ministry is in my secular employment.

As she was in full-time employment she trained on a part-time local course for non-stipendiary ministry, and expected that the locations of her ministry would be dictated by where her husband chose to serve. For Deborah, a vocation to priesthood meant being open to responding to God's call upon her life whilst also maintaining her earlier vocations to be a wife, a mother and a colleague in the secular workplace.

Naomi came to recognise her vocation to priesthood after the death of her husband, a priest in the early years of his ministry. She had a 'strong conversion' in her teens, and after being widowed experienced 'a very powerful vision of being called out' by God. She admitted that she would not have considered ordination whilst her husband was alive, but felt that his death had caused her to become more mature and understanding. Although Naomi

referred to the joy her parents-in-law felt when she acknowledged a priestly vocation ([they] 'were over the moon and incredibly supportive'), she did not acknowledge that she had ever considered whether her desire to become a priest might have been influenced by a need to continue the God-given task that her husband had, by his early and sudden death, been able to complete. Instead, she struggled with what the Church would expect of her during her curacy – she was adamant that she was not called to parish ministry, but had a 'contemplative and reflective' vocation - whilst hoping that her future would become clearer in time. Instead of feeling a sense of excitement and possibility, Naomi appeared to be facing ordination with a sense of apprehension, and a continuing uncertainty about what it meant to be called to priesthood.

A similar pattern can be discerned in Judith's spiritual and ecclesiastical progression. Brought up in a clergy household, she had Biblically-based qualms about women in positions of leadership, criticised 'the amateur nature of the organisation,' was dismissive of the low stipend offered to priests, and was horrified with the public visibility that comes with being an ordained representative of the Church: 'I really hate the idea of it, I can't bear the thought of it.' Judith had left her academic career in order to enrol at a theological college as an independent research student, her studies later leading to formal training for ordained ministry. At times it seemed as if her recognising of vocation was a reluctant bargain with God:

> I think in the last few years here, God's been very gracious to me in supplying my financial needs, you know, often through paid work, and so I think there's been – dealing with something…In the end I agreed to go with this ordination thing…[and] now I think that I could be stipendiary because I think that God has been faithful to me.

In Judith's eyes, God's 'faithfulness' was the basis of a transaction requiring her active and sacrificial response.

Like Naomi, Judith's calling to priesthood could be seen as completing the interrupted journey of a close family member for whom disability made it impossible for him to live independently or to continue his ministry. When discussing his situation, it was clear that she drew links between his illness and her acceptance of her vocation, although she felt that it was 'bad planning' on God's part. When I spoke to her in the first year of her curacy, the same ambivalence was present. 'I wish God had called someone else,' she said, and when I questioned if her calling was still there, there was a long pause before she agreed that it must be, because otherwise she would have 'cut and run.' For both Naomi and Judith, the 'ideal lives' of a husband and a family member seemed to provide such strong models of priesthood that when death and disablement intervened, the ministries could not be allowed to cease. Despite the women's strong reservations about ordained ministry, they both felt that they

were called to take up someone else's vocation. As they progressed into parish ministry, their decisions were to prove painful and costly.

Adult conversion of life

For some ordinands, the sudden onset or revival of Christian faith in adulthood acted as a catalyst for exploring ordained ministry. Some had experienced an intense experience of the Divine, or had reached a point in life where the adoption of Christianity was a considered, intellectual decision. Such ordinands tend to expect that ordination will change their lives for the better, as they have consciously chosen to give up an established way of life in favour of following God's calling, and there is a correspondingly high propensity for extreme disappointment if ordained priesthood does not meet their expectations, or if there are setbacks and difficulties involved with their selection, training or ministry. Converts, as Paul Heelas points out, are committed both to changing their own lives, and to belonging to a faith tradition which defines what it is necessary to change.[299] It could be that such individuals might find it difficult to accept that faith for so-called 'cradle Christians' can be something that is accepted as a constant background to human existence rather than a matter of choice or sudden divine intervention.

[299] Paul Heelas, 'Turning Within' in Percy, 2000 p.65

Paul had been inspired by the figure of Jesus at an early age, but had chosen secular careers that offered public approval, enhanced his concept of masculinity and offered substantial financial reward. He talked about an 'encounter with the Holy Spirit' in his late twenties that caused him to briefly attend church, but he 'drifted away' until he attended an Alpha course run by a large evangelical church. The teaching he received on Alpha made it possible for him to 'understand what was going on' when he had encounters with God, and led him to take a more active attitude to his Christianity, helping to lead worship in a church close to where he was living, whilst travelling around the world running his own business.

Outwardly confident and extrovert, Paul had been heavily influenced by strong, successful male role models. His faith had been nurtured in some of the most well-known large evangelical churches, and it was those church leaders and popular evangelists who held his imagination, inspiring him by their examples of 'ideal lives' dedicated to God and bringing large numbers of people to faith. Paul talked about his vocation with the same sense of competitive achievement that had driven him to achieve success in the secular world. He described priesthood as 'the most noble, exotic, wild' calling imaginable; an ambition that was 'probably the most dangerous thing I've ever done.' He wanted to 'fight for the Church of England, fight for evangelism, fight for the things this country needs,' and when asked where he saw his future ministry, replied, 'I'd like to be

a bishop!' adding hastily, 'that was a joke.' Paul's initial vision of his future ministry included running a large church that was 'heavily involved with evangelism' and social outreach, and working with some major figures from the evangelical wing of the Church of England. It is likely that much of this understanding of ministry resulted from Paul's location within an Evangelical residential theological college, and his own history of personal conversion, but it seemed that his concept of ordained priesthood left him open not only to the hope of enormous, God-gifted success, but also to the belief that he would have failed if these ambitions were not met.

In Eleanor's case, a combination of initial rejection from a selection board and the breakdown of her first marriage[300] led to the shelving of the idea of ordained ministry. She became a Christian in her late teens, but felt that her vocation was more personal than ministerial: 'I didn't want to change the world, I was quite happy just changing me.' In her twenties she investigated a priestly vocation, but believes that the advice she was given by her first selection panel, to come back in a few years, was 'the right thing.' When she began preparing to reapply, it was clear that her marriage was in trouble:

[300] Although until 1990 divorce followed by remarriage disqualified individuals from seeking ordination, changes to Canon Law now permit the seeking of a faculty from the archbishop for such impediment to be removed. The diocesan bishop must in each case be assured that the circumstances surrounding the divorce and remarriage will not cause scandal or distress. *The Canons of the Church of England*, 2008 pp.204-205

> I realised that my first marriage was not going to work, so pulled out of the selection thing and got divorced instead. Then…[later] I felt it was right to go forward again, and got through the selection conference.

Whilst valuing the call that led her to ordained ministry ('it feels right, it feels like coming home'), Eleanor also believed pragmatically that the experience she had gained in her former career, a public service position, would be of value to the Church:

> I think they're perspicacious enough to be able to see that the way the church is going requires the likes of myself and many others who are like me, who come from different backgrounds, who are going to be influential in altering the nature of priesthood.

Instead of having clerical role models, Eleanor believed that it was necessary for the church to adapt its selection and training procedures and learn from secular service organisations.

Eleanor saw the skills, wisdom and confidence that she had acquired during her working life as being essential to her character as well as equipping her priesthood. 'I'm not green…it does make you wonder how people who haven't got any force of character, strength of character, get on.' She admitted that this was not always easy for the Church to accept, and postulated that the Church

as institution has a problem with 'strong women,' but felt that she and similar entrants from external professions would be influential in altering the nature of priesthood. Her vocation, although clearly based on a sense of God's calling, appeared to have grown as much from conviction and determination to use her gifts to the benefit of the Church, as from supernatural intervention.

Vocation and gender

Whilst until relatively recently it was only possible for sons to consider following their fathers into the church, the ordination of women in the Church of England has added a new dynamic to the recognition of vocation. Women who might in the past have considered Christian service as being expressed in their role as mothers and home-makers, as clergy wives, or in forms of lay leadership or pastoral care, now have the option – if they believe they have a calling to ministry - of becoming priests in their own right. It remains to be seen how the children of ordained mothers will view priesthood when they reach adulthood,[301] and if the increasing presence of ordained women truly has the potential, suggested both by their supporters and their critics, to alter the dynamic between 'Father' and flock and by this, to change the nature of the Church. Men

[301] There are already women who have become priests whose mothers were amongst the first women to be ordained in the Church of England (often after long service as deaconesses and permanent deacons), but it will be some years yet before there are women with adult children born after their ordination to priesthood.

training for priesthood are able to choose to accept or reject the validity of the Orders of their female colleagues, whilst women facing ordination into an 'overwhelmingly masculinist'[302] Church that remains institutionally ambivalent about their calling will at some point inevitably face attitudes based purely on gender that would be illegal in a secular setting, and which younger women in particular may lack the experience to encounter.[303] Priesthood, though conferred by the institution of the Church is always expressed through the individual, and so cannot be separated from the influences and experiences that have shaped that person's personality and identity. Gender issues must be considered significant factors in the acceptance of vocation and the development of a contemporary priestly identity.

Although gender issues may not always be openly discussed, it is impossible to ignore the fact that the expectations and understandings of vocation held by men and women will reflect their experiences of living, working and worshipping as gendered, sexual beings. Women, even those who have accepted a call by the God in whom 'there is no longer male or female' (Galatians 3:28) will have internalised a Church tradition where the male is normative and authority has for the most part been held by men. Feminist theologians have pointed out that at times in Christian history, female bodies have been seen as 'demonic' rather

[302] Sarah-Jane Page, 'The Construction of Masculinities and Femininities in the Church of England: The Case of the Male Clergy Spouse' in *Feminist Theology* 17(1) p.33
[303] Uta Blohm's research suggests that the younger generation of female clergy, unused to encountering discrimination, may be 'ill-equipped to deal with structural disadvantages' related to gender. Blohm, 2005 p.297

than holy,[304] and one of the earliest women bishops in the Anglican Communion admitted that in the eyes of many in the Church, 'women and power do not mix comfortably together.'[305] Some ordained men have been made uncomfortably aware that the presence of women in their ranks questions and threatens their own assumptions of masculine 'invulnerability.'[306] Whilst secular society struggles with what it means to be male and female and how to ensure equality of opportunity, both men and women desiring ordination in the Church of England have to face, at some point, what it means to become an official representative of an organisation where, at present, inequality is enshrined in legislation.

Natasha Walter points out that despite the vast amount of evidence showing huge differences between people of the same sex, we still prefer to repeat sweeping generalisations about differences between the sexes. 'In so much of the work done on sex differences today,' she writes, 'instead of a recognition of the true variability of men and women, we are presented simply with stereotypes.'[307] But stereotypes are difficult to shake off precisely because they provide attractively definite visions of reality, where roles are clearly defined and explanations given for varieties of approach and experience. Feminist theorists

[304] Lisa Isherwood, 'Sex and Body Politics: Issues for Feminist Theology' in Isherwood, 2000 p.21
[305] Jamieson, 1997 p.3
[306] Pryce, 1996 p.21
[307] Walter, 2010 pp.200-201

may challenge essentialist thought,[308] but women themselves may find it reassuring to hold to a vision of a world in which instead of being seen as disruptive, they fit into a system based upon assumed gifts and skills. Hence Martha, a young, single woman training at a residential college was able to say that she believed that there were clear gender differences between male and female priests, and that the ordination of women made it 'more like a complete ministry:

> I just feel this need sometimes for 'Father knows best' just a little bit, not in too much of an old fashioned way. It feels more complete [having ordained women]. There is a sort of mother's element to it…I don't think [men's] roles have changed necessarily because women are now being ordained…they can often be seen as a definite leader. I don't know how people see us, mind!

'Ideal' priestly lives in current literature and practice, of course, are dominated by male accounts. For Martha, the 'ideal lives' model of priesthood would require both male and female practitioners in order to present a complete image of ordained ministry,

[308] Harriet Harris, for example, points out that in challenging 'male constructions of reason,' feminists risk 'buying into the very binaries they wish to contest.' Harriet A Harris, 'Divergent Beginnings' in *Feminist Theology* 23, January 2000 p.113

In contrast, Eleanor, who had previously had a successful career in a male-dominated environment, believed that both she and a woman from a similar background were treated differently from men during selection for ministry:

> They said go away and do a year of personality skills, because I do come across very strong, and they told me to go away to learn how to temper it for nine months…[Another woman was in the same position], and we both did Myers Briggs, and this bloke started saying that the Church of England has problems with women who come into this category.

Although recent statistics show that increasing numbers of women are being ordained in the Church of England, Angela Shier-Jones has theorised that the fact that the majority of them are ordained to non-stipendiary posts might reflect the desire of the Church to shape their calling into 'something manageable.'[309] If this pattern of ordination is repeated in future years, the frustrations of capable and confident women such as Eleanor, and the reticence which many ordained women show when addressing issues of gender, could have an obvious cause.

Eleanor saw the fact that she did not have dependent children and was married to a supportive but independent spouse, as enabling her to have freedom of choice in following her vocation. Other women, however, found that the calling to ministry had to be balanced against the needs of their family. Sarah had

[309] Angela Shier-Jones, 'Calling and Vocation' in Shier-Jones, 2008 p.15. She points out that of the 478 clergy ordained into the Church of England in 2006, a majority – 244 – were women, but of those only 95 were ordained to full-time, stipendiary ministry.

already been unsettled by trying to fit a priestly vocation alongside her situation as a lay woman leading house groups in a conservative evangelical church:

> there were people I knew who didn't believe in women's ministry, and obviously it wasn't about presidency, it was about authority, but everyone was very nice and gracious and, you know, Christian, polite.

When after her second selection board she was recommended for training, she spent a year trying to reconcile her family circumstances with the guidance she received from the panel. She deferred entry to a particular theological college because the course she had been encouraged to take was full; as no suitable accommodation could be found, she considered selling the family home and buying one close to college; she tried to find a place at a local school for her daughter, who was half-way through a course of exam study. None of this came to fruition, forcing her to take a place on a less academically-focussed course at a different theological college in another city.

> I'm not doing the course I wanted to do originally, and I still feel a bit of a niggle over that, but the bottom line was I didn't want to sacrifice my daughter's education for my own. I've got a strong sense of call as a wife and mother – a prior call, actually – and I don't want to drag my children through the mire as I follow what's going on in my life. It is, to some extent, [their call too], isn't it?

For evangelical women in particular, who have to overcome theological teaching that the ideal female role is to support their husbands, giving priority to the expression of their vocation, even if it is recognised as God-given, can be hugely problematic.

Although the desire to consider the well-being of their family was also expressed by male ordinands, the male respondents in my study did not tend to exhibit the same levels of anxiety as women, particularly those with dependent children, about how their vocation would fit with family life. Women tended to identify their experiences as wives and mothers as crucial underpinnings of their vocation; Rebecca insisted that 'having children and being married is something to bring [into the skills and gifts helpful to ministry] whether or not you're pigeonholed that way,' Sarah countered her conservative evangelical reservations about women's priesthood by recognising her experiences of being 'a minister to my family,' and Julie, though admitting that theological training cut into the time spent with her children and that combining her workload and family life was difficult, believed that her 'normalness' (i.e. the fact that her life was founded first on marriage and family) would be an asset in ministry.

Male ordinands, in contrast, often drew a clear separation between their family and their vocation, or were confident that the support of their wives and children would not lead to conflict between their callings to ordained ministry and to

married life. 'I'd always wanted to be ordained as long as [my wife's] known me,' said Simon, whilst Jonathan described how he had funded his wife's progress through university into professional life, which had now allowed him to have 'the financial footing to get on with this.' They had a strong expectation that they would be supported by their wives in the pursuit of their vocation. Both Nick and James became 'weekly boarders' at residential colleges, concentrating on their studies from Monday to Friday, and returning to their young families at the weekend. Although these were pragmatic decisions that presumably had their families' support, neither displayed any of the angst common to married women deciding how best to pursue vocation and training. Nick put it like this: 'they've had time to think about it. Fundamentally they're fine about it as long as it doesn't have any impact on their lives.' The traditional model of male priesthood intersects with the conventional image of the male breadwinner and head of the household. It may take longer for there to be sufficient images of female priesthood (and leadership in other areas of society) for women to feel comfortable about putting their vocational needs above those of their families.

Conclusions

To identify a calling to ordained ministry, and to actively pursue its fulfilment, is a courageous act. Would-be ordinands are required to be reckless in their willingness to set aside worldly desires in order to serve God, whilst concurrently being called to be 'realistic' in their assessment of their sense of call, their

capacity to function as ordained priests, and their understanding of what their ministry might involve. The Church of England puts it this way: 'it isn't enough simply to be convinced yourself that you have a vocation. You have to allow your sense of vocation to be tested by the Church through its discernment processes. It is the Church that validates and authorises that calling.'[310]

Although both men and women are required to make themselves vulnerable to ridicule or rejection in following this calling, there are specific gender-based issues that may affect their responses. Although increasing numbers of women are being ordained in the Church of England, there are many more men than women in leadership and high-profile roles, whilst the Episcopate is still, for the moment, reserved solely to men. Women can therefore struggle to put themselves into the image of 'ideal lives' of priesthood; they may have only experienced the ministry of men, 'authoritative' texts about priesthood are largely written by men,[311] and, as Tina Beattie has pointed out, 'authentic' tellings of women's narratives in the Christian story are inevitably mediated by men.[312] Men, who have traditionally been seen as giving priority to career and to financial provision for their families, may have high expectations of a 'successful' outcome to their exploration of ordination, whether that is seen in terms of eventual leadership of a large church, career advancement, or working in areas of clearly defined need. Women, some of whom might have struggled with theological reservations about their own ordination, can be more

[310] *Ministry in the Church of England,* 2010 p.1
[311] Or by women in contexts outside England
[312] Beattie, 1999 p.12

susceptible than their male colleagues to uncertainty about the rightness of their calling and the way in which they follow it. They are setting out on journeys which are limited by the institution of the Church itself – they cannot yet aspire to the fullness of the three-fold ordained ministry of deacon, priest and bishop – and by their own assumptions about appropriate responses to their callings.

It is clear that some of the women in my study held traditional views on the division of responsibilities within the family, considering marriage and parenthood to be as vocational as their subsequent calling to ordination. In such cases, they were more likely than men to give a higher priority to meeting the needs of their family than to choosing a form of training that best met their abilities and desires. Others criticised the way in which the institution privileged gender-based understandings and attitudes, punishing, as they saw it, women who did not fit conventional assumptions about femininity. Robin Greenwood's recent survey of a sample of priests and bishops suggested that clergy who 'feel fulfilled' in their ministries are able to cope with their 'ambivalence' towards the institutional church;[313] it is likely that similar ambivalence arises about the process of recognising and affirming vocation, and that those individuals who believe that the Church will be able to offer them the opportunity to engage in fulfilling ministries will be best equipped to deal with subsequent confusion or disappointment.

[313] Greenwood, 2009 p.36

Faith histories, life experiences and theological understandings affect the way in which individuals both identify a vocation and respond to it, but vocations are expressed within the context of secular as well as religious communities. Gendered assumptions, personal values, family situations and a myriad of external forces – the 'psychosocial cornerstones of identity[314] - influence the decisions each person will make about their vocation, and their willingness to be influenced by the opinions or suggestions of others. These elements need to be taken into consideration by those responsible for the testing and affirmation of vocation, and by the institutions offering training for ordained ministry. Both men and women are called to priesthood; at a time when priesthood as a concept is increasingly contested, and the future of ordained ministry continually under discussion by the sacred and secular world alike, models of ordained ministry – those 'ideal lives' that capture and captivate individuals aware of a priestly vocation – must reflect reality as well as idealism. The map of the ground they will have to cover in order to reach their priestly destinations must reflect the realities of the journeys they have already taken as well as the contours and obstacles of the landscape ahead.

[314] Kroger, 2000 p.181

Chapter 4

Exploration

Introduction

Choosing to become an ordinand in the Church of England requires not just faith in one's calling, but also faith in the institution which will allow and facilitate the expression of that vocation. The moment of ordination transforms an individual into an official representative of 'the Church' as well as a servant of the community, which, because of the historic parish-based understanding of priestly responsibility means *everyone* living within the parish boundaries, whether or not they attend church or express a Christian faith. The variety of expressions of Anglican faith can be startling; within a small geographic area,

one might encounter a cathedral with robed boys choir and a focus on intellectual and musical excellence, a large Evangelical church with worship band and a particular ministry to students and young people, an Anglo-Catholic church where daily sacramental worship underpins pastoral care for a predominantly elderly congregation, and a 'middle of the road' church on a housing estate that offers friendship to a multi-cultural population and operates a food bank and advice centre for those in need. There may also be smaller, more individual faith-led groups such as home groups, house churches and Fresh Expressions.[315] Each Anglican church comes under the control of the Diocesan bishop and reflects – to varying degrees - diocesan strategy and identity, but each expresses its own character in worship, theology and outreach. And each will have a parish priest (or rector, or minister, or Dean) who will, consciously or not, have a particular model of ordained ministry that has influenced his or her expression of priesthood, and who has undergone a period of selection and training that has attempted to shape that model into a form acceptable to the Church.

The previous chapter suggested that identifying and pursuing a vocation to ordained ministry requires that candidates have internalised a vision of what priesthood involves. Despite the fact that these understandings may be based upon unrealistic or partial models ('ideal lives'), they may be over-idealistic or simplistic, or reflect the theory and practice of earlier generations rather than

[315] For discussion of the way in which such groups can encourage 'privatised' or inward-facing spirituality, see Percy, 2010 p.67ff.

contemporary experience, they nevertheless allow would-be ordinands to consider what it might be like to be a priest, and whether or not they believe that they are in a position to set out upon the journey to follow their calling. It is perfectly right and reasonable that the Church, through its selection process, will gently challenge, test and attempt to shape the wilder fantasies of ministerial candidates in order to determine their fitness to practice within the boundaries of the institution as well as their enthusiasm to respond to God's call, but it is the initial dreams of those candidates that will carry them into training and towards their first parishes.

Anthropology suggests that religion combines two seemingly divergent concepts: meaning is found through cultural practices (in Christianity, for example, through such things as ritual, shared belief, Biblical interpretation and sacramental actions) *and* through recognising the power and authority of the religious structure itself (in the Church of England, demonstrated by the disciplinary, pastoral and teaching role of bishops, synodical government, and Establishment).[316] Christianity adds a third element to this paradox, that of the personal intervention of the Holy Spirit. So an individual believing in a calling to ordained ministry has somehow to combine being part of a worshipping, faithful community of believers, being subject to the authority of the institution of the Church (and also being prepared to represent that authority to others) and being ultimately accountable and continually responsive to God. The transition from

[316] See Tomlinson and Engelke, 2007 p.5 on religion as a 'cultural system' and the need for attention to issues of 'discipline, authority and power.'

being a member of the laity, no matter how heavily involved with local expressions of church, to being ordained and licensed by the bishop, requires not only the acquisition of particular practical and theoretical skills, but also the ability to find a congruence between one's personal identity, forged over a lifetime, and the imposed identity of priest in the Church of England, with all the assumptions of privilege, eccentricity and increasing irrelevance that this may imply.[317] For the institutional Church, the key to this is generally to be found in the examination of the lives of those already working as Anglican priests, both those responsible for the selection and training of ordinands, and those ministers who have been encountered in individual spiritual journeys. 'Personal stories' are expected to help to shape and develop understandings of what contemporary priesthood is, and how a priestly life is to be sustained. They begin the process of filling in the detail upon the map, so that individuals can explore the landscape and consider how they are to navigate through it.

Following a vocation

First steps

The first step towards pursuing a vocation is to discuss it with someone. This is not as easy as it sounds; confessing to others that God has called you can seem at best presumptuous, and at worst, deluded. Family members might be

[317] See, for example, Michael Hinton's *The Anglican Parochial Clergy*, which regrets the tendency towards 'individualism but less than formerly to eccentricity' in today's clergy. Hinton, 1994 p.12

appalled at the consequences of what following that vocation might mean and parish priests are not always supportive, particularly if they are uncertain about their own ministries or futures. For some people, a vocation to ordination is the fulfilment of a long-held dream, whilst for others it can come initially as an unwelcome shock. Participants in this research project recalled a variety of responses to their recognition of vocation, from the dismissal of childhood desires to serve God ('I was probably about 13 or 14, and people just went, 'oh, yeah' and…pushed it out of my mind') to the vital encouragement of a serving minister ('she was asking the whole youth club if any of us had thought of ministry') and Christian friends ('talking it over and praying it over with friends and in church'). The Church of England's booklet *Ministry in the Church of England* reminds those who feel that they might have a vocation that they must allow their 'sense of vocation to be tested by the Church'[318] and stories in the previous chapter describe the often complex periods of study, investigation and practical experience undertaken by many would-be ordinands before they are sent to the Bishop's Advisory Panel (BAP) that will assess their suitability for selection as a potential member of the clergy.

Most[319] would-be ordinands follow a predictable path: they discuss their sense of vocation with close friends or family, they talk to their parish priest, they are put in touch with a diocesan vocations advisor, they progress to seeing the Diocesan Director of Ordinands, and after a suitable period of preparation and

[318] *Ministry in the Church of England* p.2
[319] There could always be exceptions to this rule, as in theory a bishop can ordain anyone whom he wishes, but this is the normal pattern.

assessment and with sponsorship from their bishop, attend a Bishop's Advisory Panel. The BAP involves up to 16 candidates and 7 senior ordained and lay members of the Church of England, who over the space of a three-day residential meeting will investigate and test the sense of vocation. Candidates are interviewed, give a presentation, take part in group discussions, and undertake a written exercise. References will have been submitted beforehand, as will an essay on mission or evangelism. A BAP is a demanding and exhaustive examination of the individual as well as their sense of calling, and is intended, in the words of the Church of England, to 'help the bishop's advisors to get to know you as a person, and will show them the ways in which you meet the criteria for selection.'[320] If aspirant ordinands receive a recommendation from their BAP, they are invited to meet their bishop, in order to receive his blessing to enter training.

Each stage on this journey therefore involves not only a high level of commitment to the perceived vocation and to its pursuit, but also willingness to hold a very personal and often fragile belief up to the scrutiny of others. Candidates are required again and again to make themselves vulnerable to challenge and question; at each stage they could be told that they are mistaken, that they are unsuitable to be parish priests, that they could better use their gifts elsewhere. How they react to such a process depends on a variety of factors. Individuals with a secure identity of self are more likely to cope well with questioning of their giftedness and sense of vocation than those who are – for

[320] *Call Waiting*, http://callwaiting.org.uk/bap/aspx accessed 22 May 2011

whatever reason – less robust. It is possible that repeated 'official' negativity can leave a lasting shadow over future ministry; contrast for example James' contented assertion that he enjoyed uncertainty and that the more his understanding of priesthood was looked into, 'the more the reservations I had about it have gone away', with Andrea's lack of confidence about her academic abilities ('they expect you to be very well-educated, and have degrees and things like that') and her later questioning of 'my calling and my ministry.' Anthropologist Caroline Humphrey theorises that when individuals are marked by 'events' (moments of great significance), they have the ability to choose a particular identity that will enable them to influence the way in which they interpret the event and remain 'emotionally cogent,' whilst being aware of other possibilities that might be helpful to them in the future.[321] For Humphrey, it is *intention* that is of interest, and the way in which people make choices about how to interpret and react to moments of 'rupture' that might otherwise destroy their sense of self. What might, in another setting, appear to be a minor set-back, can at a significant moment be of huge and lasting significance. The way in which individuals react to such difficulties – whether or not they have the internal resources to interpret them in a way which allows them to journey forward into new landscapes and new understandings of their identity and their vocation – can be hugely important.

Early stages

[321] Caroline Humphrey, 'Reassembling individual subjects: Events and decisions in troubled times' in *Anthropological Theory* 28:8 p.363

It is hard to judge just how accurately, with hindsight, ordinands report their initial conversations with close friends and family about their calling to ordained ministry. The fact that they have, by the time they begin training, both negotiated any reservations that might have been expressed and had their vocation validated by a BAP and their bishop, means that it is easy for them to look back on the process with a glow of happy benevolence, whereas the reality at the time might have been quite different. One also has to take into account the way in which such stories are repeatedly required to be told in a form that is acceptable to the Church representatives testing that vocation and to other 'insiders': ordained clergy, fellow ordinands, college staff and so on. Because a vocation to ordained ministry is *always* under scrutiny (even after many years of priesthood, there might still be the possibility that God could be revealed not to have been in the process after all), narratives of calling are rarely taken lightly, but are told in a way which reinforces supernatural intervention, the acceptance of 'wise' others, and appropriate humility. The stories are also rehearsed by being encouraged to be told and retold, and are shaped by reading about, and listening to, the stories of those in a similar position. The standard narrative goes like this: 'Although I'd offered my life to God, I couldn't believe that God was calling me to priesthood, because I'm not worthy of such responsibility. However, when I spoke to my spouse/parents/priest/Christian friends they weren't surprised at all, telling me that they'd known for some time that this was

my vocation.' The fact that such a narrative may be broadly true should not stop it being considered with gentle suspicion.

Cultural norms of behaviour suggest that those close to would-be ordinands are unlikely to be openly negative about an expression of vocation; we tread softly on other people's dreams.[322] Even those people most implacably opposed to the following of vocation might assume that open confrontation would be unlikely to have a positive result, and would consequently avoid direct criticism in the hope that the strange idea will just wither away. The fact that all the participants in this study had already entered training suggests that they received, on the whole, sufficient support to encourage them to pursue their vocation, whilst a study of those who were not recommended by a BAP or who withdrew from the selection process might present quite a different picture. Autobiographical narratives are also subject to self-editing; the person telling the account is intimately bound up with it, and is unlikely to view their personal story with the same degree of dispassion or clarity as an outsider. This does not mean, however, that personal narratives are to be discounted as history. Feminist autobiographical studies have insisted that the 'personal and the idiosyncratic' are uniquely valuable, giving an insight into not only the experiences of an individual, but also the structural, social and psychological influences that create different understandings and divisions based on factors such as gender, class,

[322] Mathew Guest refers to the widespread influence of 'modern gentility and civility' when referring to another's faith, even in conservative Evangelical settings. Guest, 2007 p.91

ethnicity and age.[323] If the majority of ordinands are telling broadly the same story, then there are three possibilities: the story is true and tells us something about God's action in the world; the story is influenced by what is considered to be appropriate discussion about faith and tells us something about societal and religious values; the story is shaped by the expectations of the Church and tells us something of implicit beliefs about identity, agency and power. In each case, what can be learned from such narratives is important to a greater understanding of how the Church selects its future priests.

Martha is typical of the younger single female ordinands in this study in that she experienced initial reservations from a parent. She described her father as being 'delighted' by her vocation, in part because he himself had an unresolved sense that he was called to some sort of Christian service, whilst her mother was less enthusiastic, testing if this was a genuine calling or an unrealistic obsession. Martha was clearly disappointed that she had not received a more positive reaction:

> I got the result from the selection conference and I phoned her up, and rather than going, 'oh, that's fantastic, wonderful,' she went, 'oh, are you sure this is what you want?' Once I'd reassured her, she was happy, but it was just that moment where I just wanted her to be happy, and she

[323] Shula Marks, 'The Context of Personal Narrative' in The Personal Narratives Group, 1989 p.39

> went, ‘are you sure this is what you want?’ But not to worry…she’s very supportive [now] as long as I go back home [to work after my training].

Lydia described a similar scenario, made more complex by over-protective parents. Unlike Martha, who involved her parents from an early stage in the discernment process, Lydia spent some time investigating vocation before breaking the news that she wanted to be ordained:

> I waited a long time to discuss it with my parents. They were quite against it for various reasons, so [I spent] a long time fighting against that with myself as well, because I wanted my parents to be proud of me, you know…it was me coming to terms with it enough so that I could stand up to them.

Both women found the decision to pursue their vocation was complicated by the lack of enthusiasm shown particularly by their mothers. To take such a major step without full encouragement of those close to them was extremely difficult and influenced how they reacted to the demands of training and the early years of ministry; Martha did indeed seek a curacy near to her home town, and Lydia married an Anglican priest during training, stating that she hoped that God would be evident both in her vocation and her marriage.

Two male participants in this study were also single and in similar age-brackets, but their experiences were significantly different. Although Matthew described how his ordination studies had taken him overseas, he believed his parents to be 'very supportive' despite the fact that contact now was limited to telephone calls and email, and Richard insisted that although there was 'a slight wariness' within his nonconformist family about his adoption of Anglican ways, his parents were also 'very supportive' of his vocation to ordained ministry. This raises questions as to whether these differences are due to gender expectations, or simply to personality types. It is possible that female ordinands felt it easier to express worries in front of a female researcher, whilst the male ordinands were keen to portray competence and confidence, or that the two women were more prone to reflection and self-doubt than their male counterparts. It's also possible, however, that the lack of young female role models in ministry causes difficulties not only for the women considering ordination, but for the families who support them.

Because the ordination of women is, in historical terms, still a recent innovation, it takes time for the general public to become familiar with images of women priests. The first tranche of women ordained as deacons and priests - and those who were most publicly visible as the vanguard of a new era - had, in the most part, served for many years as parish workers and deaconesses and were not in the first flush of youth. Archdeacon Sheila Watson, describing an early ordination of women to the diaconate at St Paul's, quotes the reaction of a

friend: 'it was the grey hair, not the blondes or brunettes, that moved me. I had no idea so many had waited for so long.'[324] Although female priesthood might be understood to be theoretically possible, it could be viewed by 'outsiders' as an option for women who have already married, brought up children and had another career. Parents of young women, particularly those holding traditional views about female roles, might also wonder how their daughters are to marry and have children if they are undertake an all-consuming job, with significant strictures around morality and high expectations of continual public availability. Written accounts verify this anxiety. RAF chaplain Eleanor Rance referred to her desire to be married and to have children, but recognised that she lived 'in a goldfish bowl' and that potential suitors might be 'a bit put off by the idea that I'm a priest.'[325] (Such concerns do not appear to arise with parents of young men; indeed, the clichéd image of priesthood in the Church of England involves a supportive wife who will arrange flowers, lead Sunday School and bake cakes for parish meetings.) It is also likely that there will be parental concerns about daughters entering a profession which is still numerically dominated by men, where sexual discrimination is a right enshrined in law, where living 'over the shop' leaves parish priests vulnerable to abuse and attack, and where the top jobs are currently reserved solely for male candidates.

Other ordinands described the reactions of close friends to the news that they were considering becoming priests. Simon, who had spent many years

[324] Sheila Watson, 'The Call to Wait' in Rees, 2002 p.135
[325] Eleanor Rance, 'Let's Go! Let's Be Priests!' in Barr, 2001 p.249

pursuing his vocation, including at one point voluntarily withdrawing from training because ‘it wasn’t the right time to be ordained,’ said ruefully that after so long in the system, most of his friends were clergy themselves. It was unsurprising that they supported and encouraged his vocation to priesthood. Rebecca, whose father is a priest (and who offered his full support) was relieved to discover that her ‘non-church friends said they’d have to stop swearing in front of me’ but in fact continued to treat her normally. Eleanor, entering the church after a secular career said this:

> In some way [friends] think it’s a huge joke, because they’ve known me for many, many years, and the idea of me being a priest is quite amusing. I’m very irreverent, very unchurchy, but on the other hand, those who’ve known me in church life have recognised that this is appropriate.

Interviewees tended to describe three ways of receiving validation of their calling: parents or spouses gave their blessing, secular friends decided that their essential nature would not be significantly changed by becoming ordained, and Christian friends reacted with theologically-appropriate responses of prayer, joy and recognition of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Gender and preparation

There seemed to be significant gendered differences between the respondents to this study in the ways in which they prepared to put their vocation into practice. Male candidates often described either having always been involved with church, and so having only Christian friends, or having gradually shifted from secular to religious circles (often being employed by the Church in a lay capacity), so that the people they now had most contact with, and whose opinions they respected, were all themselves Christian. They had sought out opportunities to learn and to place themselves in positions of Christian lay leadership, and felt that they had already tested aspects of their vocation by responding to God's call and being effectively set apart from others by taking on lay responsibilities. (Sam put it this way: 'several people [in church] challenged me; 'if you're going to do this, are you called?') Female candidates placed more emphasis on gradual realisation that they might be called to ministry, and expressed a desire to retain the core aspects of their identity. For them, it was vital that they continued to, in Julie's phrase, be 'very normal, very human,' and to have friends who would reflect secular society as well as their Christian contacts. To use the 'personal stories' model, male ordinands often seemed to have surrounded themselves with people whose stories resonated with theirs; they knew inspiring Christian leaders, they received encouragement and spiritual support from friends whose faith was overt and active, and they felt confident that they would be able to function in positions of authority and leadership because they had already gained experience in such situations. Jonathan, despite having had a secular career was blunt about the way in which

his life decisions had been guided by his desire that one day he might be ordained: 'every choice I've every made has been geared towards it in one way or another. Do I go on the PCC at church? Yes, because it might be useful. Do I do theology at university? Yes, because it might be useful.' Female ordinands seemed to hold to a different set of stories. They tended to describe themselves in terms of their relationships (with family, friends, spouses and children) and saw their secular lives as being as vocational as any future ordained ministry. They wanted to remain the people originally called by God, rather than remaking themselves in another's image, especially if the dominant image was that of a male, authoritarian priest.

This tendency for women to remain ambivalent about their relationship with the institutional church has been noted by other commentators. Ellen Clark King's *Theology by Heart* describes how working class women in a group of North-East parishes talk about their faith and their relationship with God. Although Clark King was surprised at the way in which the women in her study held firmly to conventional images of God as a male father-figure and often had a pseudo-romantic view of Jesus the archetypal male hero, she realised that this gave them 'self-affirmation and strength'[326] As a result, they not only found strategies to cope with often unsatisfactory and difficult lives and family relationships, but also to feel themselves on an equal footing with the (male) representatives of the institutional Church. *Because* they knew themselves to be loved by and precious to God, they assumed authority when talking to their

[326] Clark King, 2004 p.186

parish priest that was often not present in other relationships with male figures. Whilst retaining an almost instinctive expectation that sacramental leadership would be male, they often dominated church practice and social outreach, they held responsibility (in a way also suggested by Callum Brown)[327] for spirituality within the home, and they felt able to speak critically about, and in some cases to directly challenge, the authority of their parish priest. They drew great strength from their church-going because it enabled them to focus on God (predominantly through prayer and sacrament), rather than because they had an inherent respect for the Church and its ordained representatives. A recent book on women's leadership within the Church argues that women remain 'dramatically underrepresented,' and are often 'silenced by family, congregations or church leaders,'[328] and Natalie Watson criticises the way in which, for women, the Church has always been a place of 'institutional injustice.'[329] Church, it seems, for many women remains a place where God can be encountered, but which is still skewed by human expectations and failings.

Male ordinands in this study took seriously the question of whether or not they were truly called to ordained ministry, but tended to assume the right to prepare for ordained leadership in the same way that they would prepare for entrance into any secular profession. Jonathan, having described himself as the product of a 'public school education' and having had roles in secular senior

[327] Brown theorises that secularisation is largely due to the absence of young women from church; women being traditional keepers of family religiosity. Brown, 2005 p.187ff.
[328] Ward, 2008 pp.13, 14
[329] Watson, 2002 p.2

management, had spent several years leading a church plant. This had led to consideration of ordination and confidence that his calling had been underpinned by increasing experience and responsibility in religious leadership:

> I was asked to consider [full time leadership of the church], and as part of that it was felt both by me and the people I was consulting with that I ought to look at ordination at the same time, the two ought to be taken into consideration together, so I've put myself forward, really, to test that.

Women, in contrast, whatever their theological understandings, had to come to terms with their own and others' expectations of appropriate female behaviour within the Church, and accept that they would at some stage face both prejudice and resistance.

Whilst men seemed to find it relatively straightforward to find ways of gaining appropriate leadership experience in church settings before heading for a BAP (Richard, for example, describing his work on the staff of a large church before studying theology), women often talked about their pastoral skills (typically gained as mothers or in other caring settings), their work as parish administrative assistants or PCC secretaries, and their sense, articulated by Rebecca, that vocation was a calling of the whole self and therefore not something that should be shaped by overt preparation:

> Vocation's about being called into being the person that you're called to be, and expressing the gifts that you've got in a way that is true to you.

Naomi echoed this, stressing that priesthood was 'about being the person you are' in order to serve God and humanity.

If this is typical of many women seeking ordination, then questions must be raised about the assumptions underlying selection for ordained ministry, which expect that candidates are able to demonstrate both understanding and experience of practical ministry and outreach. Before a BAP, for example, candidates are asked to submit an essay reflecting 'on an aspect of mission and evangelism related to your own experience.'[330] The specifically church-centred language may be disadvantageous to women, who might not recognise their pastoral and teaching roles, their family relationships, their friendships, and their practical support of administrative, social or spiritual activities (in church or secular settings) as either 'mission' or 'evangelism.' They should be encouraged to consider their transferable skills and the way in which their Christian faith affects the whole of their lives as well as their involvement in church and their sense of calling.

Priests and contemporary experience

[330] http://callwaiting.org.uk/bap.aspx accessed 22 May 2011

The previous chapter theorised that accepting a vocation to ordained ministry depended initially on finding models of ordained ministry that would sustain the early stages of the calling and present an image of what it would be like to become a priest: so-called 'ideal lives.' It might be suspected that these idealistic images would be supplanted during the discernment and selection process by a more realistic examination of what contemporary priesthood is like at a local and individual level. The often long period of preparation to formally test a vocation with a DDO and at a BAP would, in such a case become a time when potential ordinands are keen to learn from the actual experience of their own parish priests and from others they know in ministry, allowing them to move from the 'ideal lives' model to that of 'personal stories.' After all, many texts have been written in which serving priests describe what it is they do and how they understand their vocation to priesthood; initial contact with a diocesan Vocations Advisor or Director of Ordinands is usually made through the medium of the parish priest; and serving priests are expected by the Church to encourage their parishioners to consider whether they are called to ordained ministry. One might expect that in the early stages of pursuing vocation, the local priest is a focal figure, a model of what a life based upon ordained service can be.

However, interview material paints a different picture. Some ordinands had grown up within clergy households. This allowed them to envisage some of the problems associated with parish ministry, such as constant availability and the

public nature of the vicarage, but did not provide them with what they saw as adequate role models. Such ordinands tended either to assume that their fathers (and they were all fathers) were of a different generation and that they themselves would do things differently, or that it was so important to ensure that they were not simply following a parental example that they delayed pursuing their vocation in order to be sure that it was a genuine calling. Nick described having to 'unpack' the fact that his family contained many Anglican priests, Judith was anxious to discover whether her faith was based on true belief or 'because it was the way I'd been brought up,' and Rebecca initially 'decided that Christianity wasn't for me' and investigated leadership in another faith tradition. A significant number of respondents had changed denomination from nonconformist churches to the Church of England, and for them, it was the sacramental and liturgical aspects of church that seemed to have more influence than individual priests, whilst a former Roman Catholic admitted that like 'all male Roman Catholics at some point' he had been asked as a child if he was called to priesthood, but the 'remote image' of the parish priest had repelled him. It was a calling to serve, rather than 'the supernatural side' of ministry that eventually led him to investigate ordination. There seems to be a need to deliberately separate from closely observed models of priesthood, in order to find one's own path and calling.

For conservative Evangelical women, there were particular difficulties associated with finding appropriate models of priesthood. Having learned their

faith in an environment which understood the Biblical privileging of male leadership, a calling to ordained ministry often conflicted with long-held views about headship and obedience. Sarah explained that her initial sense of vocation, experienced in a church and diocese that did not support women's ministry, at first felt so impossible that she instead persuaded her husband to offer himself for ordination:

> It wasn't within the realm of what I saw or believed within the church, [but] …in a way it was safe supporting your husband, I was quite happy to be at number two, and [there was] also the question of what do I do from here, because I didn't know if my own incumbent believed in women's ministry.

Although after much prayer and study, Sarah gained the courage to speak to her parish priest and found that he was able to offer her his support (in prayer for those with teaching gifts she had come to his mind, which was 'enough for him to see God in it'), it was impossible for her to view his ministry – of church leadership and headship - as something to which she could aspire. She was rejected by her first selection conference, lost confidence in her calling, and only reapplied after moving to another diocese, taking on responsibility for 'evangelism and nurture' in another church, and receiving the support of a 'wonderful DDO.' Because ordination meant stepping outside everything she had been taught, it was necessary for her to believe in her own calling to a

ministry of word and sacrament, and to set aside the images of (male) ordained leadership with which she was familiar. For Sarah, there were simply no appropriate personal stories that could sustain her journey.

Judith, also identifying her theology as conservative and Evangelical, felt that her future ministry would have to be 'in a team situation' because of issues of headship. Like Sarah, she did not consider contemporary models of priesthood to be helpful, partly because she was still questioning her own calling and was critical of the way in which she saw other Christian ministers living out their vocation:

> The question of whether I could do this with integrity was a very big thing for me, having seen lots of people who in my opinion maybe didn't do it with as much integrity as one would hope...the rightness of it is very strong, and I'm very pleased about that. In the end I agreed to go with this ordination thing, and I thought, 'at least I'll be non-stipendiary, it won't be so bad,' but it's amazing how that has changed. Now I think that I could be stipendiary, because I think that God has been faithful to me.

The elements crucial to Judith's vocation were a determination to enact the priestly role without flinching from what might be asked of her, and the ability to remain 'faithful' to God and to her theological understandings. Other Christian

ministers (including presumably the members of her family) did not provide adequate or inspiring models of priesthood.

Evangelical men also expressed some reservations about priesthood, but with different concerns. Sam confessed to being 'suspicious of priestly language…I'm much happier with minister language,' but had few worries about his ability to lead a church. He had already spent some years in full-time lay ministry overseas, and, believing that God was calling him to more traditional church-based ministry, saw ordination pragmatically as 'the logical next step.' He was uninterested in models of priestly life, considering them to be irrelevant to his situation. What was important was what *he* was called to do, and how to be an effective leader, teacher and pastor. Priesthood was an administrative requirement of the Church, rather than the demand of God. Similarly, David described his previous experience in church leadership and lay ministry, his previous 'grounding in faith' through youth missions, and his plans to continue leading a church plant as he progressed through theological training. Like Judith, he was concerned with 'integrity and struggling inside with whether I'm worthy to do it,' and like her he looked critically at those already ordained and in positions of authority:

> I think one of the biggest problems the Church of England's got at the moment is leadership and not leading communities, not leading from the front, not being able to speak properly.

When I asked David what he thought was the role of a priest, he said that it was to bring the 'hand of God and the hand of an individual together and get out of the way.' With this understanding, and the confidence that went with many years experience in church leadership, it was unsurprising that he did not see the 'personal stories' of other priests as being relevant to his situation or his future.

This is not simply a matter of churchmanship. Catholic ordinands in this study emphasised sacrament and ontology, and hence held to the *concept* of ordained priesthood (as opposed to describing their future in terms of leadership or pastoring), but they too paid little attention to investigating models of contemporary priesthood. Instead of looking outside to the experiences of those already ordained, like the Evangelical ordinands above they looked forward to the development of their own skills and gifts, and to appropriate preparation for future ministry. They were, perhaps, less inclined to be concerned about issues such as their motives in wishing to be ordained – in simplistic terms their theology suggested that surrender to the transforming influence of the Holy Spirit was more important than agonising over whether they had been drawn to ordination because of worldly ambition – but like their Evangelical colleagues, they were keen to look forwards rather than consciously investigating whether the experiences of other priests might shape their expectations. Simon, for example, talked of the 'inner compulsion' that had always made ordination seem

unavoidable, even at its most unlikely, and of his belief that there is ‘a difference between being a priest and doing ministerial things.’ Lydia spoke of the need to spend time ‘working out who I am’ (with the implication that she was in the process of being changed by ordination training and by attention to God), and James analysed his understanding of priesthood as ‘being made to be different for God.’ They were concerned primarily with being shaped into something new by the activity of the Holy Spirit, and so saw as irrelevant the experiences of other particular people in particular places.

When talking to ordinands about their initial stirrings of vocation, they often mentioned Christian figures that had inspired them to consider if they too might be called by God. These individuals formed their templates of what dedicating oneself to Christian service could involve, and acted as ‘ideal lives’ in the sense that they suggested possibility and coherence. However, it appears that these early images of ministry are not, as it might have been expected, replaced with examples drawn from more recent experience, or from close and mature observation of other ordained people. It is likely, therefore, if the ‘ideal’ image is not developed into a more fully-rounded model by investigating the reality of ‘personal stories,’ that ordinands are primed for discordance between what they experience as they move through training and into parish life. They are left particularly vulnerable to potential disappointment or even to the disintegration of their sense of calling.

Making choices

Identification and guidance

After an appropriate period of preparation, discussion and investigation, individuals hoping to become priests spend time under the care of a Diocesan Director of Ordinands before attending a Bishop's Advisory Panel. Both DDO and BAP hope to achieve two things: the discernment and testing of a realistic and informed vocation to ordained ministry, and the guidance towards an appropriate training route for the likely future ministerial setting. Balanced against the hopes and desires of each candidate are the needs, resources and expectations of the Church. Training future ministers is expensive; most ordinands will not have to pay any contribution towards course fees, and those who attend residential theological colleges will usually receive free accommodation and food.[331] Ordinands with dependent families will often be given financial support, and single ordinands receive small maintenance, vacation and travel grants. Even ordinands living in their own homes and training part-time (sometimes whilst engaged in secular employment) receive travel costs and book grants, and are asked to attend regular short periods of residential training for which they are not charged. The Church therefore faces a potential dichotomy between the desire to offer people the best training for

[331] Older candidates selected for Self Supporting Ministry (eg who do not expect to receive a stipend) are usually expected to train on regional part-time courses. If they choose to train residentially, they may be asked to pay for their tuition and maintenance.

their needs and the requirement to steward its financial resources wisely by minimising its costs.

The Church is also required to consider what its future requirements might be before actively recruiting people to, and training them for, the priesthood. In a period of intense social change and decreasing formal affiliation to institutions, it is difficult to predict what ordained ministries will look like in as short a period as twenty years time hence. Short-term measures such as the current 'Call Waiting' campaign to attract younger ordinands (in part as much to address concerns about the clergy pension scheme as to be relevant to a younger generation) are only symptoms of a bigger issue; fewer stipendiary priests and increasingly amalgamated benefices suggest that Church of England priests of the future may be asked to fulfil a pseudo-episcopal role, overseeing a geographical area rather than a parish and enabling lay volunteers to take on many of the roles which have, in the past, been traditional duties of the clergy. Many dioceses already have formal training schemes for those who, for example, wish to become authorised preachers, pastoral visitors, undertake work with children and youth, visit hospitals and prisons, or administer Holy Communion by extension[332] to the housebound, the elderly and the ill. Many parishes employ administrators. The days of expecting all tasks to be carried out by the parish priest – even if this might be the assumption of some of those training for ministry - are long gone.

[332] The bread and wine has been consecrated by an ordained priest at an earlier service.

The previous chapter examined the ways in which initial vocations to ordained ministry are shaped by experience, understanding and context. The choices made by potential ordinands about how they train for the priesthood are equally contingent, yet have the potential not only to form their understandings and practice, but also to affect the way in which they are viewed and deployed by the wider Church. Students are not simply entering a new phase of education, but are preparing for a radically – and permanently - changed life,[333] so it is to be expected that the experience of training for ordination will both test their vocation and attempt to shape them into people who will adequately serve and represent the Church of England. There may not be a single approved image of what a priest may be, but there are firm expectations that a particular way of life and being will be inculcated during training in order to equip ordinands for their future ministries. As colleges and courses can differ in the detail of their interpretation and expression of what they believe to be required by the Church, it is vital that the path chosen is one that will allow the ordinand to grow in confidence, knowledge, understanding and holiness. A poor fit between institutions and individuals can threaten future ministry and personal self-understanding by undermining self-confidence, the perceived ability to fit into the institution of the Church of England and even the vocation that called them to ordained ministry. In some cases, it can even result in a loss of faith.[334] If ordinands do not have a

[333] As already pointed out, priesthood, once conferred by ordination, cannot be revoked, although authority to exercise that priesthood on behalf of the Church can be withdrawn.
[334] See for example Karen Armstrong's description of how the harsh treatment she received as a young nun led to breakdown and the loss of her belief in God: 'I had been certain that, if only I tried hard enough I would see the world transfigured…[but] my hope of discovering eternity had died.' Armstrong, 2005 p.166

clear and accurate understanding of the ethos and practice of the college or course that they have chosen (or been persuaded) to attend, they risk finding themselves in an environment which will not allow them to flourish both during training and in subsequent ministry and may have lasting negative consequences. The role of reports by DDOs and BAP on not only the affirmation of vocations, but also the way in which those vocations are allowed to be expressed, cannot be underestimated.

Training routes

The Church of England currently offers three approaches to training for ordination: full-time attendance at a residential college, part-time non-residential training on a local course (a similar model to the Open University, usually involving evenings, weekends and a summer school),' and 'mixed mode' training, where students combine part-time training with some more concentrated full-time residential courses. There are twelve residential theological colleges that are 'recognised and inspected' by the Church of England, and twelve part-time ministry courses.[335] The part-time courses usually draw students from the area around their main teaching locations, and hence tend to identify themselves in terms of geography. All approved theological colleges and courses undergo regular inspections by representatives of the Ministry Council (along the lines of OFSTED inspections for schools) and

[335] http://www.cofe.anglican.org/lifeevents/ministry/qualityassurance/recognisedinstitutions.pdf accessed 3 March 2010. There are in addition four schemes for training ordained local ministers, but these fall outside the parameters of this study.

follow a similar curriculum, but each has a very distinct identity and particular strengths.

Potential ordinands, when choosing how and where to undertake training, have to negotiate a complex system of expectations and limitations imposed by the Church of England, as well as identifying their own preferences and requirements. Some will be setting out on a journey of exploration, whilst others will have a specific destination already in mind. Although the Church is clear that the bishop, in consultation with DDO and the candidate is ultimately responsible for ensuring that choices are made about training based on 'learning and formational needs,'[336] the decision about where and how to train must take into account a range of factors that are unique to each individual. Some decisions may be driven by personal or family issues, such as the desire to keep teenage children at their current school, whilst others are based on less quantifiable influences like the historical reputation of, or family connections with, a particular institution. Theology is important: residential theological colleges tend to reflect a particular churchmanship, some identifying as catholic or Evangelical, whilst others celebrate an ecumenical approach. Candidates might choose a college where liturgy, worship and teaching will feel comfortable and familiar, or they might deliberately look for somewhere to extend and challenge their previous experiences and understandings. The location of colleges can be significant; transport links, urban or rural settings, facilities for spouses and children, availability and standard of accommodation; all play a

[336] *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church: The Final Report on the Regions*, 2004 p.4

part in decision making. The Church, much like the Armed Forces, forms a community with which few 'outsiders' have contact. Those who are set apart by a vocation to service routinely train for leadership in environments to which the general public does not have access, and are bound by rules and regulations which might seem archaic or ridiculous to those who do not subscribe to the core aims and values of the institution. The 'enclosed'[337] nature of most Anglican theological training and the rapid pace of change imposed by external factors, mean that the candidates themselves, unless they are in close contact with ordinands already in training, might not be fully aware of the ramifications of the choices they make.

It is therefore easy for ordinands either to make choices based on inaccurate information, or to find themselves categorised by outsiders in terms of historical or stereotypical understandings: *this* college produces *that* type of priest; *that* course is for *those* kinds of people. Lydia, for example, confessed that she had been influenced in her choice of theological college by a combination of its academic reputation ('I thought, I get to go to [a respected university city], it's very exciting, it must mean I'm clever') and because of the reputation that the college had acquired over the years:

[337] By this I mean not that ordinands are locked away from the world, but that they join communities of learning that tend not to be accessible by the general public.

> I thought I'd know what it would be [because] I'd heard all these stories…so I came expecting lots of young rogues drinking in the Common Room, and it's not like that at all.

The training route chosen by individual ordinands can influence not only the way their personal ministries are shaped and developed, but also the way in which they will come to be viewed by others when they look for their first posts after ordination.

Training, wherever it is based, is rigorous and demanding; this is to some extent a deliberate strategy that aims to ensure that candidates are committed to their vocation and able to withstand the pressures of ministry (the handbook for those considering vocation puts it this way: 'it is part of continuing to discern your vocation and to discover what sort of ministry is appropriate for you'[338]), and partly the inevitable consequence of trying to balance the need to adequately shape, test and inform ordinands against the restrictions of limited budgets which require training to be of a finite length. However, financial implications play a large role in the options open to candidates. Full-time residential training for a period of three years is currently expected of all candidates under the age of thirty, as they are considered to benefit from the experience of living in community and from the in-depth study available in an extended course (any young ordinands who already have a degree in theology may be offered a two-year course). Candidates aged over thirty who train residentially will typically be

[338] *Ministry in the Church of England*, accessed 24 February 2010

offered a two-year course, sometimes with the option to reach degree-level qualifications by pursuing their studies on a part-time basis after ordination. Candidates on part-time courses will usually be over thirty, and their training will typically last for three years. There are some exceptions to this, for instance, trained Readers (Licensed Lay Ministers) routinely take a shortened course, and those aged over fifty will be guided to the type and length of training considered most suitable for them by their bishop and director of ordinands. The majority of older candidates will be expected to train on part-time courses, although some mature ordinands choose to become self-funding students on residential courses. In each case, decisions have to be made about the type of training that will suit the individual's needs, experience and potential, whilst ensuring that the Church gets the best return on its investment of time and money. The two are not necessarily mutually supportive.

An in-depth study, published in 2003, of the way in which the Church trains its priests (commonly known as the Hind report) questioned whether current arrangements were able to 'provide the range of training needed at a good standard.'[339] A follow-up draft report was produced three years later, which confirmed that some of the recommendations of the Hind report had been put into practice, most noticeably the replacement of categories of sponsorship for ministry based upon stipend, with a single category – ordained ministry - plus identification of the expected focus of future ministry (for example, nationally

[339] *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church: The structure and funding of ordination training*, 2003 p.19

deployable, potential incumbent, ordained local minister). The report suggested that changes should be made to the arbitrary cut-off point between 'younger' and 'older' candidates, increasing it from 30 to 32 years; that the automatic reduction in training requirements for theology graduates was no longer appropriate as the wide variation in the structure and content of theology degrees required individual assessment of each case; and that the prior learning and experience of increasingly mature candidates should be taken into account. Any changes, however, were to be made without cost, with additional expenses in some areas being offset by the savings made by some candidates being steered towards 'less training or less expensive training.' [340]

Although all the ordinands in this study began their training shortly before the promulgation of this draft report, and so would not have been affected by the changes made to sponsorship categories or the attempts to more closely tailor training to previous education and experience, they would have found their experience of course or college shaped by the ramifications of post-Hind thought. The positive consequences were that they would discover that they were not expected to reach ordination academically fully-equipped for the remainder of their ministry, but that life-long learning would be encouraged, and, throughout their curacy, would be mandatory.[341] But they would also find themselves training in an environment where cost is measured against potential.

[340] *A new approach to Bishops' Regulations for Training for ordinands*, 2006 p.3
[341] The period of 'initial ministerial training' or 'IME' is now considered to last for 7 years: up to 3 years pre-ordination and up to 4 years in a first curacy, or equivalent, post. In some cases, IME begins with pre-Bishops' Advisory Panel study and exploration, leading some dioceses to refer to 'IME *minus* 2-7.

Some would believe that their options had been limited before they even began training by their age or their gender, a formula that conflicts with the theological understanding that each person is of immeasurable value.[342]

Those training on local courses are likely to have fewer options, as they will need to be able to travel to training sessions after work or around the demands of their family, but there is the opportunity for some people to choose between courses that have a strong ecumenical element, or those that are closely associated with Anglican residential theological colleges. There is anecdotal evidence that some candidates, particularly married women, have felt under pressure from their DDO to choose part-time training rather than residential training because it is less costly to the Church.[343] As there is an assumption, vigorously denied by the Church but nevertheless documented in a recent inspection report, that part-time study can never 'be as academically rigorous, as able to develop community and corporate life or be as supportive of formation as traditional full-time residential courses,'[344] it is vital that those who undertake such training are there because it best meets their needs. To steer candidates who would prefer the community and formational aspects of residential training towards local courses because they cost less – even though financial savings

[342] It could be argued of course that the classification of priests as 'stipendiary' or 'non-stipendiary' is deeply unchristian and that the alternative 'self-supporting minister' is little better, as it still categorises individuals by their financial status.
[343] Study of figures for those training on local courses certainly shows a gender imbalance; the South East Institute for Theological Education currently has 53 female and 37 male ministerial students. See *Inspection Report: South East Institute for Theological Education*, 2010 p.9
[344] *Inspection Report: South East Institute for Theological Education,* 2010 p.6

may be substantial[345] - risks creating ordinands who are resentful and disillusioned. This is likely to be particularly significant in the case of female candidates, who alongside the knowledge that their future ministries will be unacceptable to some people because of their gender, could believe that the Church is denying them the 'best' form of training and making suppositions that they are likely to work without a stipend and only in supporting roles. Training involves the gaining of theoretical knowledge and practical skills, but it also begins to mould the shape of future ministries. It is vital that the best 'fit' possible is found between the wishes and resources of the Church and the needs of the individual.

Training Decisions

The choice of how and where to train can, when set alongside the enormity of vocation, seem to be a relatively trivial matter. If God is in the process, and if the Church is prepared to offer advice through the DDO about the most appropriate way to undertake the required training, then that may be all that is considered necessary. However, as the previous chapter discovered, vocations to ordained ministry can engender feelings of great vulnerability, and are rarely investigated in isolation. Just as the affirmation of others is a crucial part of identifying vocation, the influence of authority figures, friends or family can be an important part of the process when discerning how best to train for ordination.

[345] The post-Hind report quoted average costs for each year at theological college for a single person as £13,300, for a married person with two children as £24,900 and on a regional course as £5,400. *A new approach to Bishop's Regulations for Training for ordinands,* 2006 p.10

Such guidance, however, can easily be based upon outdated assumptions or information, be inappropriate for a particular person's circumstances, or make false assumptions about theology or practice. Instead of planning their route to priesthood by gathering accurate information, individuals can attempt to base their journeys upon anecdote or history: they refer to a guidebook rather than a map. The very act of beginning training for ministry requires ordinands to leave behind their former identities; no longer fully lay-people, but not yet ordained ministers, they will spend two to three years in which the friendships they make, the discussions over cups of tea, the habits of prayer and worship developed and the differences of theology expressed by colleagues will be as important as any formally-imparted learning. Social groupings within college or course, and the culture and context within which learning takes place, are crucial.

For some ordinands, it will be important that their future ministry is based in a particular expression of church practice and theological identity. Individuals may therefore choose a training route that they hope will affirm and reinforce their religious identity by prioritising particular approaches to faith and theology, whilst others might deliberately choose a college or course that will expose them to different understandings and divergent viewpoints from their own. Whichever approach is taken, social psychology suggests that three things are necessary for them to flourish: they must feel that they are developing a distinctive identity related to the institution,[346] they need to feel that their vocation allows them to

[346] Erikson sees this as being developed by offering 'defined duties, sanctioned competitions and special freedoms.' Erikson, 1994 p.156

express their personal identity,[347] and they should believe that they are part of a group which shares common understandings and offers 'social verification.'[348] They need, in other words, to feel both stretched and supported. Other ordinands take a more pragmatic approach, choosing, for instance, a residential college which will welcome their spouse and children. Helen Thorne pointed out at the beginning of the millennium that the 'problem' that women priests, particularly those married to other priests, posed to the Church in terms of childcare and working arrangements would not decrease unless changes were made at an organisational level.[349] Although institutional change may be slow, it does seem that residential theological colleges are adapting to the fact that ordinands – both male and female - with spouses and young children will actively seek an environment which offers welcome and support to families. (Randall's study of stipendiary clergy pointed out that Evangelical clergy were more likely than other groups to have spouses with strong expectations that they would be involved in church work,[350] suggesting that Evangelical ordinands might look specifically for a college which has a clearly-defined active role for their spouse) Single students might look for a college with good transport links and opportunities to maintain a social life outside the college environment. There may be specific reasons for choosing a particular geographical location, such as elderly parents, working spouses or children's education (all mentioned by members of my research group), or a simple belief that somewhere is the

[347] Kroger, 2000 p.182
[348] Fiske, 2004 p.482
[349] Thorne, 2000 p.74
[350] Randall, 2005 pp.184-185

'right' place to be. One young female ordinand put it this way: 'as soon as I got here, I thought, I could make this place home.'

The multiplicity of factors influencing the choice of training route and its location serve to increase the importance placed by ordinands on measuring the 'success' of the training experience. They accept that aspects of training will not be easy, but their belief that God is at the heart of the process encourages hope that, in the words of Julian of Norwich, 'all manner of things will be well.'[351] When problems or difficulties arise, as they inevitably will, the resulting conflict between expectation and experience – the anthropological 'rupture' or 'event' - has to be processed within suitably accommodating theological and theoretical frameworks in order for the individual to understand it as a positive means of transition rather than a sign of God's displeasure or the mishearing of their call. This of course calls upon responsiveness, flexibility and sensitivity from the training institution and teaching staff, but also relies upon the individual's personal resources: whether or not the sense of vocation is both robust and realistic, and whether past life experience is likely to encourage a robust approach to disappointment or uncertainty.

Some of the respondents to this study were already aware that there could be difficulties ahead. Sarah expressed concerns about her future ministry, describing herself as looking forward to ordination with 'an equal mix of excitement and terror.' Apprehensive about the fact that she viewed herself as

[351] Backhouse and Pipe, 1997 p62.

‘a conflict avoider’ who wanted to be liked by others, and that as an Evangelical woman there would inevitably be some issues about authority (‘it’s not the thing that worries me the most…I’m doing whatever I’m doing because God has called me to it, and so that is the bottom line’), she also recognised that her marriage added a further complexity to her situation. Her husband had previously investigated ordination, but had not been recommended by a BAP. Worried that she might be ‘trying to transfer his thing onto me,’ and very anxious that her husband would be hurt if she followed a path that had not been opened for him, Sarah believed that it was vital that her husband also had a role in her future ministry:

> I have a real heart for…my husband and me to be involved in it together. He has a ministry, he’s a Reader, he’s been preaching a lot longer than me, and so whilst at the moment I want to go forward for ordination and he’s been left aside, I would see us both very much being involved in ministry in the community.

The only way in which she could justify her persistence in pursuing vocation when her husband did not continue to seek ordination after his own rejection (Sarah also had been turned down herself by an earlier BAP) was to believe that theirs would be a shared ministry of equal value.

There will be further discussion of the influence of children and spouses on the training process itself in the following chapter, but it must be noted that decisions about the choice of where and how to train showed significant gender differences. Sarah was advised to seek a place at a college which although Evangelical in outlook was 'broader' in its outlook than the college in which she had earlier studied theology. Struggling with the realisation that her vocation was likely to disrupt the lives and education of her teenage children, she initially contemplated leaving them with her husband in the family home and commuting to college as a 'weekly boarder',[352] but threw the decision open to her family:

> We met as a family and discussed it, we prayed about it, and the girls actually said 'no, we'll come together, we don't want Mum to be away,' so the whole thing's been very much a family decision

She therefore applied to return to her original college, even though the course it offered her was not as academically suited to her educational background. In fact, all of the married women with dependant children in this study, even those with children in crucial stages of education, chose either to train on local courses, or to bring their families with them to residential colleges. This did not tend to be the approach taken by male ordinands, who often made pragmatic decisions. Nick decided to weekly commute to a residential college in order to give his teenage children 'stability at a critical point', but found that one place he visited was unused to families living apart: 'I had a conversation with them and

[352] i.e. attending college from Monday to Friday, returning home at weekends.

they were completely mystified…it became completely obvious that this was not going to be the right place.' Although he confessed to feeling guilty about the fact that he had enjoyed the experience of community life whilst leaving his wife at home with teenagers, he was convinced that the quality of his experience was paramount, and his choice of college was shaped by its staff's understanding of his decision to separate family and training.

Differences in the choice of training institution can be motivated as much by theological expression as by gender. All those choosing to base their families elsewhere during theological training identified as catholic or liberal in their theology, whilst all of my married respondents at an overtly Evangelical college were accompanied by their spouses and children. This could of course reflect the preference of the college rather than the wishes of the ordinand, but interview material suggests that both wives and husbands of Evangelical ordinands were deliberately taking an active part in the college community and would expect to continue such participation in future parishes. Those training on local courses formed a very different group, with a complex variety of reasons for training part-time rather than in a full-time residential environment. Most were older than their counterparts in residential colleges, and all those who chose to take part in this research project were married with children (often already independent adults) and with many years active lay involvement with church. The national bias towards placing older female ordinands on local courses has already been noted, but it should be recognised that several of my

respondents, of both sexes, chose this form of training because they wanted to maintain their secular careers whilst preparing for ordination. Often this was due to simple financial necessity (two respondents were clergy wives who had worked throughout their marriages to supplement their husband's stipends, and could not imagine the family existing on a vastly reduced income whilst they trained, another had school-age children and a large mortgage), although it was also the case that both men and women in the study intended to combine part-time non-stipendiary ministry with their secular jobs, seeing ministry in the workplace as an integral part of their calling. What was notable about those on local courses was that their theological understandings tended to be less sacramentally-focused and more open to taking elements from a wide variety of expressions of churchmanship.

Most surprisingly, what was largely absent from decisions about training pathways was the influence of bishops, DDOs or current parish priests. In this part of the vocational journey, as in initial discernment of the priestly calling, what dominated was either an instinctive personal reaction ('there was something that made my heart feel it was the right place'), practical factors ('I wanted to have access to the university and other theological colleges, and not too far north') or what would later prove to be romanticised images of what a particular place would be like: a place which had produced lots of bishops, or where the 'right' kind of theology would be taught, or which had been attended by previous generations of respected clergy. Once more, the 'ideal lives' model

retained its hold on the imagination; the contemporary reality of ‘personal stories’, including the up-to-date information held by those considered by the Church to be responsible for selecting and sponsoring candidates for ministry, was set aside in favour of hopes and dreams.

Conclusions

The period between accepting a vocation to ordained ministry and entering training is a time of intense vulnerability. Candidates are required to put themselves in the hands of ‘expert’ representatives of the Church and to submit to their will: it is impossible to enter training for the priesthood without the approval and sponsorship of a bishop; bishops rely upon the guidance of a Bishop’s Advisory Panel; being sent to a BAP demands the belief of a Diocesan Director of Ordinands that the vocation is genuine and informed; DDOs work with Vocations Advisors who initiate the process of discernment and of gaining appropriate experience; referral to Vocations Advisors and DDOs is usually through the offices of the parish priest. No matter how urgent the calling, the process can, and often does, take years.

At the same time, each would-be ordinand is listening to an inner compulsion that they believe to be the work of God, through the offices of the Holy Spirit. The clash between the bureaucratic demands of the institution, and the spiritual insistence of a response to God, can cause both anxiety about the validity of the

calling itself and the worthiness of the individual to pursue such an audacious ambition. Former Bishop of Oxford, Richard Harries, writes that authentic personhood is the key to faithfulness:

> The characteristic features of our personality, which make us what we are, and by which people recognise us as the person we are, become richer and more distinctive, the more they are transparent to the Christ who is being formed within us[353]

but what happens if that 'distinctiveness' is not deemed to be acceptable to the Church? It is not only those groups which have been viewed as sources of 'taint' and division, such as women and homosexual persons, who feel vulnerable in disclosing their true selves; potential ordinands are caught between the need to be open and honest about their faith, their everyday lives and their deepest secrets, and the fear that to do so would be to stifle a calling towards priesthood that is too insistent to resist.

As previously suggested, the initial response to a vocation to ordained ministry often feeds upon images of priesthood gained from an influential or trusted figure: the so-called 'ideal lives' model. But although it might be expected that those pursuing a priestly vocation would extend that model with examples drawn from contemporary examples of priesthood in a variety of settings, particularly from those authority figures responsible for the nurturing and examination of

[353] Harries, 2002 p.128

their calling, this is not reflected in interview with new ordinands. Perhaps because their DDO and their bishop are situated within the hierarchy of the institutional Church, and because the priests they know intimately as family members or as their parish incumbents are recognisably fallible human beings, they do not serve to supplant the image that sustained the original sense of vocation. A vocation to ordained ministry is, after all, a calling to model oneself and one's life on Jesus Christ, and therefore to strive after perfection. Michael Hampson, reflecting on the end of his own ministry, puts it like this:

> The Church of England dream is to be the soul of the nation. We came from the kind of thriving parishes and undergraduate chaplaincies where everything seemed possible…Places like these are in a tiny minority: we were caught up in a dream that bore no relation to contemporary reality.[354]

High hopes, and unrealistic expectations, can be followed by crashing disappointment. If the discernment period of vocation does not begin to address this, perhaps for good reason – extreme vulnerability needs a dream to hold on to – then how are our future clergy to guard against such disillusionment? Perhaps the answer is to be found in the compulsory period of theological education and preparation for ordained ministry.

[354] Hampson, 2006 p.10

Chapter 5

Formation

Introduction

Armchair travelling is no substitute for the real thing, and serious travellers have to eventually leave the security of home. For those who set out upon the journey, there comes a point where an abstract concept becomes very real.

After wrestling with a sense of vocation; after a period of time in the hands of Vocations Advisors and Directors of Ordinands; after the trials and testing of the Bishop's Advisory Panel; after the obligatory meetings with the sponsoring bishop; the verdict of the Church on the validity of the calling is at last delivered, and training, for those considered to be acceptable candidates, begins.[355] They are to be 'formed' into clergy. The previous chapter looked at some of the reasons given by ordinands for their choice of training route and institution, and considered the role of those in authority in shaping and guiding those decisions. It suggested both that advice offered by official representatives of the Church might not always be to the advantage of the future ordinand, as issues such as cost and gendered expectations can influence decisions taken at an institutional level, and that individuals themselves can hold onto an unrealistic or idealised view of what ministry and training involves. Yet the Church considers standardised and carefully monitored[356] training to be essential to prepare ordinands for ministry, and is prepared to make a significant financial investment in such training. Candidates themselves generally have high expectations of what their training will achieve. It is a time that has the potential to set patterns and impart knowledge that can shape and inform entire future careers, and as such, is of vital importance.

[355] Of course for some people, the Church says either 'no' or 'not yet', leading to a very different future.
[356] The Church has its own inspection programme of theological courses and colleges, similar to OFSTED.

Although it has been argued that the professionalisation of ministry is a relatively recent concept (Michael Hinton describes the immediately post-Reformation clergy as a 'motley crew' who often 'lacked education, or even the elementary knowledge essential to their calling'[357] and Holifield identifies the lack of a 'common occupation' amongst medieval clergy as crucial to their self-understanding as a 'collectivity with a distinctive status' rather than a professional group)[358], today's clergy are expected to be sufficiently educated and trained to undertake a wide variety of tasks in diverse settings. When wrestling with the concept of ordained ministry in the late 1980s, a General Synod paper suggested that the 'priestly character' could be demonstrated in the following identities:

a. the priest as cultic functionary or as preacher/teacher;
b. the minister in relation to the congregation or in relation to the wider church/world;
c. the derivation of ministerial authority from office or from training;
d. the priest as 'minister' or as 'enabler of the ministries of others.'[359]

It could be argued that, like Holifield's medieval clergy operating – amongst other things - as friars, monks, diplomats, teachers, lawyers and parish priests, today's ordained men and women who work within equally varied settings might quite rightly describe themselves as belonging to a distinctive collectivity rather

[357] Hinton, 1994 p.7
[358] Holifield, 2007 p.28
[359] BMU, 1986 p.9

than a profession. It is undeniable, however, that they are expected to function as if they are professionals by appropriately maintaining a representative role in their respective communities whilst carrying out a multiplicity of roles, after training and examination,[360] with competence and dignity.

There is therefore a weight of expectation resting on the training and education which ordinands receive. They are to function as cultic representatives within a society which is often suspicious of their motives and abilities whilst pursuing its own spiritual agenda through 'personal development and consumer choice,'[361] but they are expected to respond appropriately and intelligently to whatever is demanded of them. The Church may remind its clergy that learning is continual and lifelong (the recent shift to describing the initial phase of ministerial education as lasting not only until ordination but throughout the following three to four year curacy emphasises this), but both the 'unchurched' public and churchgoing parishioners alike see a clerical collar and rightly expect competence. Alongside these external demands run the dreams of the ordinands themselves: that training will not only give them the skills they need, but also affirm their vocation, enable them to flourish as individuals as well as trainee priests, strengthen their faith and deepen their relationship with God. As investigated in previous chapters, they may be overly optimistic in their hopes, but it seems that it is largely idealism rather than reality ('ideal lives' rather than 'personal stories') that drives their desire to offer themselves for ordained

[360] This may take place by any combination of formal written examinations, assessment of course work, and reports on practical placements.
[361] Brown, 2005 p.196

ministry and service. Although each putative ordinand will have been exposed through their own Christian experience and by the selection process to many different priests with varying theologies, backgrounds and expressions of ministry, they tend to cling to one dominant image: *this* is what a priest is, and *this* is therefore what I must become.

Whether training is full- or part-time, or a combination of the two; whether it is residential or locally-based; and whatever its theological emphasis; it is designed to produce candidates ready for ordination and fit to begin working as ministers of the Church of England. The majority will work in parish settings (and remain in parish ministry for the remainder of their careers), and training reflects this, but wherever they are, all will be expected to be very visible symbols of the Church, their faith, and even of God. In order to bear this weight of responsibility, alongside their academic and practical studies they will be expected to develop habits of prayer and reflection that will sustain and encourage them, and to find sources of help and support (such as 'soul friends' or confessors) to offer advice and direction. They will be encouraged to 'debrief' and 'offload' within their peer group as well as with staff, and to share knowledge and experiences. The training process itself is intended – if only by the experience of living and learning alongside others[362] - to expose ordinands to other theological, scriptural and pastoral understandings and church practices,

[362] Whilst overt in residential colleges, 'community' is also encouraged in part-time courses which usually contain elements of residential training (such as a summer school) and the division of students into groups who study and pray together, may be given responsibilities such as leading worship, and offer each other practical and pastoral support.

to encourage a sense of communal endeavour and responsibility, and to allow vulnerability and increased personal understanding. 'Truth emerges,' claims Archdeacon Malcolm Grundy, 'in community.'[363] It is, in short, designed to be a period of shaping or 'formation' as well as of education.

The term 'formation' is not one that will be acceptable to all. It can imply a Catholic theology that will be resisted by some Evangelical Anglicans. Others might argue that formation is a task that is in God's hands, not ours; that we are called and loved as we are, not as the Church attempts to make us; or that formation is not something that is reserved solely for the priesthood, but is a crucial aspect of active Christian discipleship. Rowan Williams, for example, has suggested that the 'building up of each by all and by each'[364] is something that is essential to *all* Christians, not merely to those preparing for ordination (although this in itself reinforces the concept of change and creativity that is possible in community); a point reinforced by Ian Bunting, who writes that formation must happen 'among the people of God'[365] who call certain individuals to ministry, as well as within theological institutions. However, although those who see ordination as a public commissioning rather than as a moment of ontological significance would disagree, I believe that the traditional emphasis of the Church in the supernatural role of the Holy Spirit during ordination[366] allows that change is not only possible but is required of those who offer themselves to

[363] Grundy, 2003 p.13
[364] Williams, 2000 p.234
[365] Bunting, 2009 p.9
[366] Hands are laid on the head of the candidate by the bishop (and sometimes by other clergy too) whilst prayers are said calling down the gift of the Holy Spirit.

priestly service. The period of theological education leading up to ordination is a time when that process of change is deliberately initiated. Ordinands might, up to this point, have been firmly resistant to the shaping of their idealistic images of priesthood. Surely training for ordination will supplant their visions of 'ideal lives' by the imposition of an academic and a practical structure upon which their future ministries will be based? Perhaps this is the point at which the 'investigative texts' model, which allows intellectual examination of the issues surrounding priesthood, will come into play.

Beginning training

Making the move

The majority of ordinands in this study began their training with high hopes. This is in itself unexceptional; at last being able to prepare for ministry after the long selection process, and taking a decisive step after prolonged periods of prayer and discernment, is likely to induce feelings of relief and excitement. One ordinand put it this way:

> I spent a year-and-a-half saying, 'I'm going to college,' and now I'm actually here it does feel very different. I found the first week here very, very emotional, because there was a sense of culmination of so much.

But alongside the optimism usual in those embarking on a new career or way of life runs the additional desire to do well not purely from selfish ambition, but because the vocation itself is to serve God and the community in order to further the divine purpose. Ordinands are working *through* the Church and communities of faith, but *for* God. This underlying assumption has the potential to encourage effort and commitment, but also means that if individuals feel that they are not coping well with training (and later with ministry), it might mean that they believe that God is angry with them or absent. Karen Armstrong, for example, describes how her inability to meet the requirements of her convent eventually led not only to her secularisation but also to the destruction of her Christian belief,[367] and Raymond Hedin, who left his Catholic seminary before ordination, writes about his exposure, during training, to 'a God who was interested in very fine distinctions, a God who expected His creatures to get things right.'[368]

The Church of England, whilst acknowledging that there is no one dominant image of ministry, and therefore no one dominant way of being a priest,[369] does set down the elements of training that are essential for those preparing for

[367] Armstrong, 1997 p.260
[368] Hedin, 2003 p.243
[369] Rowan Williams, quoted in Cocksworth and Brown, 2002 p.4

ordination, and formally assesses the progress of its ordinands throughout their pre-ministerial courses. Training institutions are required to submit end of course reports to ordaining bishops, and although this is unusual, ordinands who have not reached the required standard, or who have not completed all of their assignments, may find their ordination delayed. Again, this is unsurprising if ordained ministry is considered to be a profession, but it sits uneasily with the understanding that God's calling, whilst expressed within the confines of a faith community (and, in the Church of England, one that is historically both bureaucratic and hierarchical), is essentially individualistic and personal. Malcolm Torry has argued persuasively that the clergy 'are professionals, but not in the same way that other professionals are,'[370] and that as a result, authority structures can simultaneously reflect two different models: the secular and the religious.[371] It is easier, Torry believes, for the Church to reflect the more simple structures found in the management of secular organisations than it is to come to terms with the diverse, volunteer-led aspects of religious institutions. Although Torry draws only tentative conclusions from his research, his recognition of the complexity of managing religious organisations, and the potential conflicts between the structures and values they espouse, must be of concern to those interested in the well-being and flourishing of new entrants to the clerical profession. (Percy similarly argues that in sociological terms, the Church is not an organisation, but an institution, 'in which only certain types of

[370] Torry, 2005 p.34
[371] Torry, 2005 p.177

management will be possible.')[372] It will become clear that the reticence often demonstrated by representatives of church structures when faced with struggling ordinands or clergy is potentially both unkind and damaging to individuals and parish alike. The effective and appropriate supervision of pre-ordination training by the Church is crucial.

New ordinands have very quickly to learn both how to cope with the academic and practical demands placed upon them by the Church, and also how to live in a way which appropriately reflects their new status as trainee clergy, including, for single students, adhering to the Church's strictures on sexual morality.[373] For those taking up places at residential theological colleges, the upheaval of moving home, often to an unfamiliar part of the country, and making the associated practical arrangements, can be a source of anxiety. Ordinands with families expressed concern about finding schools for their children and employment for their spouse, and about leaving friends, family and the support of their church communities behind. These anxieties are not unique to ordinands - they will be shared by anyone moving to train or work in a new location - but unlike employees of major companies transferred from one branch to another, or Armed Forces families upon posting to a new base, ordinands are likely to be financially worse-off as a result of beginning training, as they may go from earning dual incomes to living on a small maintenance grant. There may also be consequences of families beginning to realise that ministry will make

[372] Percy, 2010 p.114
[373] Expressed most recently in the Windsor Report.

them public figures too; one ordinand confessed that his wife had found it difficult to be expected to attend some community meals ('she's quite a private woman') and another realised that with young children, his wife was having to bear most of the burdens associated with his training: 'right now it's much harder on her than it is on me.'

Single ordinands worried about living in community ('I didn't live in when I did my last degree, so it's a bit weird'), about the quality of college accommodation ('It's not your nice modern accommodation, but...') and about keeping in touch with friends living elsewhere. The majority of ordinands were anxious about coping with the academic requirements of their studies. Some had unhappy memories of previous formal education, considering themselves to be 'unacademic,' whilst even those with high-level academic qualifications, including one respondent with a doctorate, found the shift of expectations from university to theological college to be challenging; Richard, for example, worried about the timetabled space allowed for self-study and reflection: 'what do I do with the rest of my time?' It is interesting to contrast the concerns of residential students with those training part-time on a local course. Deborah, married to a priest and working full-time in an academic environment, felt that as she began training there hadn't been 'any major surprises' and that although finding time for placements and summer school would take up much of her leave from work, she didn't expect the course to be problematic. David, who had considerable experience of lay church leadership, admitted that he 'needed quite a bit of academic training,' but

was relieved to have been given credit for previous practical experience and theological study that allowed him to omit the first year of his course.

Part-time students were, unsurprisingly, less concerned with matters of personal identity and of the impact of their decision upon their families than full-time ordinands; the fact that all those interviewed were in full-time employment during training, were continuing to live in their own homes, and were either married to serving priests or involved in local church leadership meant that they had a much more secure sense of who they were than residential ordinands, who faced a complete change of life. They knew that combining work and study would be difficult, but had considered how to cope with this. (Indeed, a recent inspection report for one local course praised the way in which students juggled multiple responsibilities, considering this to be 'an excellent experience to prepare for the pattern of life of an ordained person.)[374] It was clear that they tended to assume that the priestly vocation would not cause significant changes to their lives; only time would tell if that assumption was accurate or misguided.

For some ordinands, beginning training was associated with well-formed assumptions about the future. Paul, for example, believed that he was called to a public, individualistic ministry. Inspired by the thought of being 'committed to the work, the vision,' he hoped to work alongside a well-known charismatic figure in a very specific area of evangelical ministry, operating largely outside the structures of the Church of England. He realised that the Church that was

[374] Ministry Council, 2009 p.37

ordaining him would want him to serve a parish-based curacy, but expected that this would allow him to follow his desire to continue learning from the people he viewed as crucial to the flourishing of faith:

> What I would hope for is maybe to work as a curate for a vicar that is really into evangelism and would release me to go and work with [my mentor] because I think that the contacts I would make with him would help that church…if the Church of England had been doing its job it wouldn't need Alpha as a rescue remedy, so something's not worked.

Guided by his understanding of which routes would train him for a ministry of public evangelism, provide biblically-based teaching, and be respected in Evangelical circles, and by the advice of the man he considered his mentor, Paul had applied to train residentially at a large Evangelical college. Although a little daunted by the academic requirements of his college of choice, his first weeks in training were marked by unbounded optimism and excitement:

> Everything's been good. The training, the people, the Principal and the teachers, the lecturers – they're passionate and focused, the other students are very dedicated, very committed with their hearts for God. The love they have for each other, the consideration, the time we are given by the tutors and give to each other; I've never seen anything like it. Everything is fantastic, everything. I love it.

When pushed, he admitted that the accommodation could be a little cramped and dilapidated, and that chapel was crowded, but insisted that this was only 'physical stuff.' This was the beginning of a journey that would equip him to 'help people grow…[and] develop all their gifts,' and God was at the heart of it. 'They say that God puts dreams on your heart, and in this relationship with [my mentor], God's awakened something in my heart about evangelism and speaking to large numbers of people,' he explained. His expectations of the way in which the next two years would equip him for ministry, and his hopes of the shape that ministry would take, were exceptionally high. Failure – or what Paul would interpret as failure – was unthinkable.

Sarah, similarly training at a residential college with a focus on conservative biblical teaching, had mixed expectations of her time at theological college. She held on to a clear understanding that if God had called her into ministry, then God would be present in the experiences preparing her for it, but she also carried a degree of uncertainty about her role as an Evangelical woman preparing to lead worship and to teach:

> I might be feeling totally paranoid, but here I am standing at the front, and I'm leading worship, and doing whatever I'm doing because God has called me to do it, and that's the bottom line.

She also admitted that the initial non-recommendation for ministerial training had been a ‘real experience of brokenness’ (although she considered that pain to have made her more sensitive in pastoral situations), and that there could be times when she would fail to measure up to peoples’ expectations:

> You’ve got the pressure from here [at college] from people who think women shouldn’t be training, and then you’ve got the pressure from women in ministry to be a sort of out-there feminist, which I don’t think I am…I’m delighted that as a woman I can be a son of God, with all the inheritance rights and that sort of thing.

Although she was ‘absolutely delighted’ to finally find herself at theological college, her previous experiences of resistance to her vocation to priesthood, coupled with the difficulties she had encountered trying to find a place to study that would suit both her hopes for training and the needs of her family, left Sarah uncertain about whether she was ‘resilient’ enough to cope with ministry. She hoped that theological training would enable her to grow ‘an understanding’ of what ordained ministry means, but admitted that at the present moment, she had ‘almost recoiled from the idea of being a priest.’ Her whole future depended on the success of the training experience.

Most ordinands, of course, fall somewhere between these two extremes. They are optimistic that training will be both the means to an end and a way of

strengthening their vocation, whilst being aware that some aspects of the experience are likely to be challenging or difficult. There are, however, several distinct modes of understanding reflected by the respondents to this study, which have the potential to colour both the way in which they interpret their experiences during training, and affect the development of personal resources which they will carry forward into ministry. These can be summarised as follows:

1. God has called me here, God will be with me throughout this, and so all will be well.
2. The journey here has been complex and at times painful, and I am not yet sure that I am in the right place or doing the right thing.
3. I have responded reluctantly to a sense of vocation, I expect to be miserable much of the time, and I don't expect either training or ministry to be anything other than difficult.
4. I know that I am already competent and understand what ministry will be like, so I am just here to fulfil the unnecessarily bureaucratic demands of the Church.
5. I am pleased to be here, but I am uncertain about my ability to cope with the academic, practical or personal demands of training.

Each category brings with it both promise and threat. John Paul Lederach has theorised that vocation involves what he terms 'the mystery of risk;'[375] of finding one's way home by stepping out into the unknown. Beginning training for

[375] Lederach, 2005 p.163

ordained ministry is a moment of risk that encompasses the immense mystery of God and the likelihood of change. How that training is perceived by the individual is a complex and unpredictable process.

Settling in

It has previously been noted that the 'investigative texts' that examine aspects of faith, ministry, society and Church life fall into three distinct groupings: texts that have been long-respected, but were written for previous generations and therefore are not directly applicable to today's ordinands; texts which take a detached sociological, psychological or anthropological understanding of expressions of faith and therefore are not fully cognisant of what it is like to be a Christian priest in today's Church of England; and texts which pursue a polemical agenda, often advancing theories of secularisation, and therefore tend not to offer encouragement to those committed to working within the strictures and structures of the Church. It is particularly difficult to find texts that offer both realistic and authoritative pictures of ordained ministry in contemporary society; a combination of nostalgia for a mythical time when the Church of England was the unchallenged voice of the nation, and recognition that diversity and post-modernist suspicion of the overarching narrative makes it unwise to be prescriptive about what priesthood *is* (as opposed to what it *can* be), means that ordinands cannot easily be pointed towards something that will instantly reveal to them the secrets of ordained ministry. A follow-up paper to the Hind Report

made it clear that training institutions need to take account of the 'broader range' of ordained ministries and of developments in 'other spheres of vocational training'[376] when making decisions about education for ordained ministry (the parallel with other forms of vocational *training* is instructive, suggesting that priesthood can be reduced to a list of practical competencies that are universally agreed to be essential). It seems that the Church is at the same time uncertain about what it is educating and training its ordinands for, whilst becoming increasingly interested in assuring a common excellence amongst the very varied training institutions. Ordinands themselves have to negotiate an appropriate path through this confused landscape of theory, practice and understanding.

By developing the intellectual abilities of ordinands, and by imparting what is considered to be either essential or representative academic knowledge about Christian faith and the Church of England, ministerial training institutions hope to equip students to go out into the world as ordained clergy, and to give a sense of the breadth of available academic material that might be useful to them in their future ministries. As well as imparting the practical skills that they will need (such as leading services of sacrament and worship) and encouraging self-awareness and interpersonal skills, colleges and courses have to teach academic knowledge of subjects such as Biblical studies, Church history, ethics, pastoral theology, liturgical studies and sometimes Hebrew and New Testament

[376]Hind Choice of Pathways Group, p.3 http://cofe.anglican.org/lifeevents/ministry/workofmindiv/tetc/safwp/index.html/draft.doc accessed 3 March 2010

Greek. Although different levels of attainment are demanded of students doing certificate or degree-level study, they are expected to reach a minimum standard of knowledge and will in most cases have their work validated by an external agency, usually a university.[377]

There can be divergence between the expectations of training institutions and training parishes; colleges and courses often focus on the academic and theoretical skills of their ordinands, who can later find themselves in parishes where the assumption is that training has focused on the practical tasks of ministry: leading worship and administering the sacraments, running parish groups, and taking school assemblies. Whilst it is reasonable to expect familiarity with Anglican services and the pastoral offices, ordinands will usually need to be taught how that particular parish expects them to conduct services and most will value direct supervision in their first funerals, weddings and baptisms. There is simply too much to be learned in a short space of time (and such a variety of ways in which those tasks are carried out at a local level) to spend days practising the functional tasks of ordained ministry. Recent emphasis on seeing the beginning of a curacy as the move from one form of training to another, rather than the completion of all instruction for ministry, at least encourages clergy themselves to recognise the need to continue learning. The understandings of their training incumbents and parishioners might be quite different.

[377] Most ordinands now have the opportunity to count the work done under the auspices of their theological college or course towards degree-level qualifications.

Upon beginning training, some students were already looking forward to the moment of ordination and beginning work in a parish. Richard, a few weeks into his first year at a residential college, talked enthusiastically about quickly setting 'into a routine mode' and 'thinking about what type of church I want to go into, what church will train me best in a curacy, those kind of things' although admitting that 'in three years' time it might look very different.' Sam, who said 'if you want to make God laugh, tell him what you think you'll be doing in five years' time,' nonetheless talked with approval about the combination of teaching and discussion at his college which was 'good practical stuff' whilst being deeply suspicious of how subjects such as pastoral psychology would enhance his future ministry: 'I haven't yet been convinced.' There were clear signs that church practice was a significant factor; ordinands of both sexes with a more Evangelical focus tended to look for training that would be 'useful' in leading parishes and in underpinning a ministry of the Word ('I've been on the receiving end of some very good preaching and teaching...I have a desire to communicate that to others') whilst those to whom spirituality and sacrament were more important affirmed the value of having space and time to pray and reflect, and to explore what their vocation might mean. A female student studying on a highly academic course said that despite the pressure of study, she was continually reminded that what was important was her growth in spirituality and understanding: 'the emphasis is put very strongly at the beginning, and it continues, that this is about formation, it's not about passing exams so much.'

Another woman in residential training, describing her background as 'very Evangelical, very low church,' explained that she had deliberately chosen a college that would expose her to the 'breadth' of Anglicanism, and that she valued more than anything else the 'formation stuff,' and a male student who had spent a placement with Benedictines affirmed the importance of their 'four-fold understanding of work'[378] and the crucial nature of 'the inner work.'

Part-time students on local courses, aware that a lot of study had to be fitted in to a small amount of evening and weekend tuition time, were less concerned about issues of formation, retaining a clear expectation of what would be required of them and which skills they would need to develop. They were critical of sessions that seemed unfocused or diffuse, whilst valuing clearly academic teaching; Deborah described her frustration at a weekend where 'there was a crossover with multi-cultural and inter-faith and gender…it was just trying to deal with too many issues,' whilst happily listing the subjects that had been safely ticked off: Old and New Testament, Church History, Christology, redemption, theodicy. Other course participants also looked for tuition that would be directly relevant to the church settings in which they expected to serve their curacies, and were surprised that some elements they believed to be essential (for David, already involved with setting up a church plant with an Evangelical outlook, this included leadership and management training) did not form part of their course. There was an assumption, tinged with disappointment, that it is impossible in part-time study to cover academic subjects in the same depth as on a full-time

[378] The Daily Offices, manual labour, lectio divina and inner transformation.

course, perhaps reflecting the presumption referred to earlier that local courses were less academically demanding and trained people to a lesser standard than the traditional residential model. Nicola, reflecting back on her training, felt that 'they really did try very hard to prepare us for ministry,' but that it would have been helpful for her course to be 'more focused' on a smaller range of subjects. The respondents to this study training locally had all taken very pragmatic decisions to train in this way, in the main because they had external commitments to employment and family that had to be maintained. Because they all expected to serve their title posts either in their sending parishes or in places well-known to them, they expected their training to be equally pragmatic, giving them the skills and knowledge they needed rather than offering the range of study opportunities available in residential colleges. There was an underlying sense that they already knew what would be helpful preparation for ministry, and that they should be allowed greater input into selecting the elements of training they undertook. This could be simply a result of each participant already having considerable church experience (as lay leaders and clergy spouses), and being confident in their abilities, or could reveal a deeper trend of expectation about non-residential training.[379] (Interestingly, a similar point is made by Percy, who believes that the need for clergy to be responsive to the opportunities and expectations revealed by their local context suggests that 'quality [of ministerial education] may need to be valued more than quantity.')[380] As the Church, grappling with the costs of training ordinands, relies heavily upon the provision

[379] It would be interesting to see if similar expectations exist amongst those training on local courses who would have preferred to train residentially.
[380] Percy, 2010 p.102

of local courses, this is a factor that could be of significance in both curriculum development and the encouragement of particular training routes.

The training experience

Practice and prospects

The first weeks in ministerial education are likely to be busy and bewildering for part-time and full-time students alike. Returning to interview the participants in this study a year into their training, I hoped to discover whether their initial impressions of what college or course would be like had been accurate, and whether the experience of the training process and the emphasis placed on community had begun to shape their image of the clerical life and how they would live it out in practice. I expected a greater degree of realism about the process of pre-ordination training, and in some cases disappointment that it had failed to live up to high expectations. I was sure that some individuals would find living and working alongside others, or existing on a greatly reduced income, to be challenging, and that some people might wonder if they had chosen the right place – theologically, practically or spiritually - in which to study and to live. I also hoped that there would be increasing recognition that, in Michael Sadgrove's words, a vocation to ordained ministry cannot be solely 'a private response to God's call,' but must recognise that it is '*the taking up of public*

office in the Church.'[381] Although I expected that at this stage in the training process there would still be much that ordinands believed they needed to learn academically, practically and personally, I thought it likely that they would be beginning to get a sense of where their gifts and skills might be leading them, and what it might be that the Church would ask them to do. I did not expect this process to have been easy or straightforward.

For older ordinands, the second year of their training would also be their final year. For them, decisions about curacies were imminent, with many people knowing by Christmas where they were to serve their title, and others well-advanced in the process of finding a suitable parish and training incumbent. Ordinands following a three-year course would have longer to assess where they might be called to serve, but would also have to come to terms with watching people they had trained with preparing to leave and be ordained, whilst they still had another year of study and assessment to complete. Both groups had completed enough of their course to be aware of their individual competencies and areas of weakness, whilst the fact that the majority of students would have undertaken an extended summer placement in a parish should have allowed them to get a sense of the routine, variety and visibility of ordained ministry. They should have all been exposed to different understandings of church practice, of theology, of Biblical interpretation and of priesthood (whether or not they would call it such) by a combination of academic study, the expectations and practices of their college or course, and by living,

[381] Sadgrove, 2008 p.22

working and learning alongside others. It could be expected that their early, somewhat naïve, images of the ordained ministry (ideal lives) would have been extended, shaped and grounded in the messy reality of everyday life. 'Formation' should be well under way, underpinned by the theoretical and academic resources of 'investigative texts.'

However, anthropology reminds us that Christianity itself is never a simple concept. Fenella Cannell writes that Christianity is 'not an arbitrary construct' but is both 'historically complex' and reliant upon particular, socially located expressions of belief, practice and experience.[382] How Christian faith is understood and constituted at a local level depends on many individualistic factors that are difficult to quantify or predict, and the manner in which each ordinand reacts to the theological education that is intended to prepare them for ordained ministry similarly draws on previous experiences and culturally specific understandings. The Church of England will prepare them for a representative ministry (and at their ordination they will assent to traditional Anglican belief as expressed in the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion), but the way in which they interpret such ministry, and therefore how each should be 'formed' (should such formation even be possible), will vary greatly from ordinand to ordinand. The path that they navigate towards their destination will depend upon the ground they have already encountered upon the journey as well as the plans that they have made. They may be resistant to being shaped into a particular expression of priesthood, and the Church itself does not appear to have a clear idea of what

[382] Cannell, 2006 pp.7, 13

it hopes that its newest clergy will learn to become. As Alan Billings has suggested, it is likely that the biggest influence on ordinands remains the image of clergy who they have admired, and this image is difficult to 'overcome or modify significantly.'[383]

Living in community was, for some ordinands, an experience that although valuable, created some tensions. James described community life as 'helpful', but admitted that it was like living in a goldfish bowl, visible to all: 'there are times when you just want to be able to not have to be part of it and not want to be there in the public eye.' He also criticised the 'mindless following of tradition stuff' where, in a college that encouraged students from a variety of church practices, ordinands of similar backgrounds tended to form cosy cliques:

> we have people from such a broad range of backgrounds, from non-conformist through to sort of high Forward in Faith Anglo Catholic, and there are times when…the way the students can relate to each other can feel quite unhelpful. I struggle most with the bitchy, lazy, cotta, gin-soaked sort of thing; it doesn't feel all that brotherly or sisterly.

Although the college clearly hoped that ordinands' horizons would be broadened by experience to students of differing understandings and practices, in reality that could, on occasion, cause division and resentment.

[383] Billings, 2010, p.167

For others, different forms of exclusion created their own problems. Lydia described how she was the only student at college studying for a higher level qualification, and how because of her academic commitments she was 'excused from most of the rotas that govern [college] life.' Although she appreciated the opportunity to concentrate on preparing for exams, she felt isolated from the college community, and believed that there was 'a bit of an anti-intellectual feel at college.' When the sense of community and friendship was strong, however, it could be enormously helpful. Julie talked about the support of college colleagues being much more useful than her academic studies: 'knowing that some of them will be friends for life, and some of them I'll be able to phone up in 40 years and say, 'I've got this situation, you know, pray for me,' that's really good.' But like Lydia and James, she did not find that fellow students of differing theological stances were stretching her concept of priesthood, indeed she was becoming increasingly conscious that she didn't fit herself into the widely-accepted model of Anglican priesthood at all, identifying that as being male, professional and middle-class:

> I can't fit into any of those categories; I'm not male, I don't feel called to work in a middle-class setting, and I don't want to be professional in the sense of always getting it right.

Julie described herself as being happy at college, although under-confident in her academic abilities ('it's always hard work'), but she held firmly to the

expectations she had always held of the type of priest she would never be. In her first weeks in training she told me that she valued 'normalness' and didn't 'have a clue' into which part of the Church of England she would fit. Well into her second year, this was still her understanding.

There were differing comments about community life from students studying at a residential college that identified itself as Evangelical in approach and practice. Sam realised quickly that many of the students were considerably younger than himself, and that this would put him at a disadvantage when applying for jobs later in his career: 'there are a few guys here who are 22, 23, and…by the time I'm an incumbent, I'll probably be 40, so I can't win on that one.' Although he valued his secular experience in lay and church environments, he believed that competition to obtain good posts would give an advantage to those who had the chance to gain experience in ordained leadership at a younger age. When ordinands train at a place where they expect a particular style of teaching and worship (as opposed to ordinands at colleges that emphasise the variety and range of their practice), any change at all can leave them feeling unsettled. A particular set of circumstances at one college will be discussed in detail later on, but smaller changes also affected second year ordinands; Sarah confessed that a new intake of first year students meant that 'chapel feels like its taken on a different characteristic,' and that after two family bereavements, the relentlessly enthusiastic tone of the local church in which she worshipped each Sunday was beginning to grate: 'I found the intensity of 'every week's a mountain top' really

hard.' Richard, studying at an Evangelical college also expressed the belief that college had changed since his first year: 'there are fewer outspoken charismatics, fewer female ordinands; it's a different place.' Judith, in contrast, who had been miserable during her first year about the 'lack of liturgy, loud music, lack of subtlety in singing' in her college chapel, was delighted that a new intake of students had changed the balance of expectations and practice. 'It's much better, vastly better,' she said. But like their more Catholic counterparts, these Evangelical ordinands still held on to their earlier expectations of what it was that they hoped or feared that they would do as ordained clergy, and the types of parishes in which they would work. Exposure to new ordinands, and to a deeper knowledge of the academic subjects studied during their training, did not appear to have changed their internal image of priesthood at all.

The one aspect of formal training that appeared to significantly influence students was the experience of being sent on a long summer placement. For many ordinands, this involves spending several weeks in an unfamiliar parish, often in a different part of the country (and for a few students, overseas), where they 'shadow' the incumbent and gain practical experience of such things as leading worship, taking on parish responsibilities, pastoral care and visiting. For some, this can open up new vistas of possibility, as situations or understandings that they might previously have dismissed become vivid examples of faith in action, and for most, it gives the confidence gained by seeing and experiencing the normal routine of parish ministry. Sarah, for example, whose faith had

emerged in a conservative Evangelical suburban church, was sent for six weeks to live and work in a rural cluster of Anglo-Catholic parishes. She knew that aspects of their theology might cause her some difficulty ('I spoke to my spiritual director before I went about…things like the theology of the sacraments, praying for the dead and that sort of thing') and was daunted on her first Sunday to 'dress up in an alb and deacon when you don't have a clue what you're doing,' but found that the experience of talking through doctrinal understandings with the parish incumbent, and of experiencing a faith that was based around sacrament and routine practice, gave her an insight into a previously unformed aspect of her Christian faith. 'By the end of my six weeks there,' she said, 'having done the Daily Office and had Communion probably four or five times a week, I felt so spiritually sustained…it's undergirded me for the last few weeks.' Sarah realised that her theology and that of her Catholic host were 'not so far apart' and began to value the role of the Church in small communities so much that when she came to accept a curacy, she moved to what she described as a 'traditional church' in a small market town.

Richard spent his final summer placement at a large Episcopal church in a major city in the USA. Although studying at an Evangelical theological college, his musical abilities had led him to work at a more Catholic Anglican church during his period of discernment of his vocation, and encouraged him to hope in the future to find a church where 'word and spirit together…[but] not at the expense of a kind of sacramental understanding' would be possible. Spending his

summer at a very large church, with a wide variety of styles of worship, made him realise that it was possible to work outside the Church of England: 'three years down the line, who knows? I may well look.' Richard did admit that the difficulties he was experiencing in finding a suitable curacy in the UK, coupled with his enjoyment of his time in the USA, had left him unsettled and wondering where his future might lie. Julie expressed a similar frustration about returning to college after an enjoyable and fulfilling placement: 'it was very hard coming back from a summer placement. I had such a good time…it was just great being out there and doing the stuff. I found it really hard coming back to learning.' Unlike some other ordinands, however, she had been sent to the type of parish in which she hoped to find a curacy; a parish in a deprived urban setting, with clear social need. The placement, although enjoyable, had not stretched her understandings of her vocation at all.

Midweek and Sunday placements are also a common aspect of residential training, and can offer the opportunity to get to know another parish through repeated contact over a year, and also the chance to experience forms of ministry outside a parish setting. Ordinands may work with hospital, university, prison or school chaplains, take on responsibility for children's or youth work, or learn from Diocesan Advisors in such fields as working with the deaf, with rural communities, or with the socially excluded. Again, such an experience can help ordinands to clarify their hopes for future ministries (by testing, for example, what they believe might be a call to hospital chaplaincy) or to cope with

particular issues which they fear might colour their priesthood. Lydia, who had close experience of the effects of serious illness, found that academic study into the spirituality of sickness and pain helped her to find strategies to 'deal with people in death and dying and suffering…it's partly final year preparation stuff,' as well as giving her an insight into how faith understands the journey she had earlier been forced to undertake. She described it as 'cathartic, but also academically enjoyable.' Sarah, who had recently experienced two deaths in her immediate family, was offered a placement at a local hospice. She found herself 'in floods of tears' at the thought, but after prayer and reflection came to the conclusion that she was drawn to it: 'it was like a compulsion.' Her experiences there were quite literally faith-enhancing:

> Yes, it's in extremis, and it's a place that ministers to people in a place of pain where most of us hope we'll never have to go to, but within that it's a place with the most incredible sense of the presence of God. It's about living deep instead of living long… I keep thinking, a lot of us will never have this attentiveness in the whole of our lives.

She had been afraid of confronting death and its consequences, but found herself uplifted by the love of God she found in the hospice.

Full-time residential students are routinely offered such opportunities to experience new parish settings, different theological understandings, and some

of the variety of work available to clergy. Martha, initially very unsure about where she should serve her title as a curate, was convinced that the placements she had been given during training had both confirmed her calling to priesthood and opened the possibility of working in rural areas: 'if I hadn't had the opportunity for placements and things like that, it wouldn't have happened in the same way…[through placements] I've really grown, learned about weaknesses, strengths, where I keep seeing the influence of God.' Matthew affirmed that through a combination of 'academic studies, placements and personal development' his vocation had become 'clearer, it's taking shape.' Yet part-time students on local courses, who may be engaged in secular employment during the week, and who often expect to maintain contact with their sending parishes at weekends and during the holidays, may not be offered this experience. It has already been noted that ordinands training locally tend to have very firm ideas about the future expression of their vocation; it seems unlikely that the theoretical examination of other situations, settings and understandings will have the same impact as residential ordinands report from placements elsewhere.

Difficulties and disappointment

Finding a title post

Despite the hopes of ordinands, and the efforts of those responsible for their training and formation, things sometimes go wrong. This can be the result of

external or personal events that are not under the control of the college or course, or can reflect issues or problems directly related to the training institution or fellow ordinands. For some people, setbacks will be considered normal and unremarkable, but a few ordinands will interpret any difficulties in the progression of their vocation, even those which seem to others to be relatively minor, as devastating threats to their entire future. Anthropologist Caroline Humphrey theorises that when individuals are marked by 'events' (moments of great significance), they have the ability to choose a particular identity that will enable them to influence the way in which they interpret the event and remain 'emotionally cogent,' whilst being aware of other possibilities that might be helpful to them in the future.[384] For Humphrey, it is *intention* that is of interest, and the way in which people make choices about how to interpret and react to moments of 'rupture' that might otherwise destroy their sense of self. As the journey towards priesthood requires a combination of vulnerability and determination, there is always the possibility that episodes that threaten the equilibrium between those two states have the potential to undermine both vocation and psychological well-being. What might, in another setting, appear to be unimportant incidents can have huge and lasting significance. The way in which individuals react to such difficulties – whether or not they have the internal resources to interpret them in a way which allows them to move forward into new understandings of their identity and their vocation – can be hugely important.

[384] Caroline Humphrey, 'Reassembling individual subjects: Events and decisions in troubled times' in *Anthropological Theory* 28:8 p.363

Most of the respondents to this study experienced moments of frustration: with the training system, with their dioceses, with the reactions of family and friends to the demands and stresses of training, or with teaching staff or their fellow ordinands. The majority found ways of coping with the consequences. One ordinand described how a period of isolation during a relatively minor infectious illness had made him fall behind in his studies, necessitating the switch to a different, less academically demanding course. Although disappointed by this, he took the pragmatic decision to complete the lesser qualification in order to be ordained alongside his year group, and catch up with the necessary study to complete the original course during his curacy. Another recognised that when she was feeling overwhelmed by the 'imposition' of academic demands and the pressures of communal living, she needed to 'go off to the countryside twice a week to recharge and get my head back straight.' Realising that frustrations built up when she was tired and feeling hemmed in by others, she developed a simple coping strategy that worked. A part-time student found that the reorganisation of prayer groups by course staff threatened to undermine the closeness and trust that had been painstakingly built up over the first year of training, but with her fellow-students, made a request to return to the original groupings:

> we ended up going to the course, and saying, 'look, do you mind if we reorder our prayer groups in our own way'…having spent a whole year

> building up relationships with people, it was just terribly hard to be expected to break those and build up a whole lot of new relationships.

Each of these ordinands had the confidence to look at situations that were having a negative effect, and to find ways of addressing them. It is not coincidental that each person had entered training as a more mature student, and that they had worked in secular careers before considering ordination. They trusted their own instincts, and believed that the teaching staff of their training institutions would support them in finding ways past any problems that might arise.

In contrast, some ordinands struggled very badly when things did not go to plan. For some of them, lack of confidence about their own abilities, or underlying fears about their worthiness to be ordained, were exaggerated by apparent 'failure.' Others revealed that unrealistic expectations had led to unachievable goals for their ministry and their personal life. The immediate effects of disappointment may have been fairly transient (although they still have the potential to cast a shadow over future ministry), but in some cases were devastating and long-lasting. Anthropologist Joel Robbins theorises that Christian faith makes it a duty to create meaning from all aspects of life, including those psychically traumatic moments that he terms 'ruptures,' because the alternative is to accept a meaningless world.[385] (He suggests that this is

[385] Joel Robbins, 'Afterword: On Limits, Ruptures, Meaning and Meaninglessness' in Engelke and Tomlinson, 2007 pp.212-214

achieved by identifying what has been broken from as meaningless, thereby reinforcing meaning in the new future.) In some cases, where difficulties are practical and probably transient, this is a relatively easy process. Richard, for example, was miserable to have been 'released'[386] by his sending diocese at a time when his friends at college were celebrating offers of exciting curacies. His bishop had sent him to look at one parish, but neither Richard nor the incumbent of the parish had felt that they could form a 'beneficial' relationship. He described his frustration at the process ahead:

> I very much wanted to go back to [my sending bishop's city]. I'm young, I'm still single, my friends are there…I'm fairly certain that there are enough jobs out there that I could get a job somewhere, but I'm not sure at what point I go, 'well, actually, I'll take this job' if it's not a job that I would jump at.

In our first interview, Richard had been uncertain about in which type of church he was called to serve, other than expecting it to be 'in a big city.' His hope had been to find 'something that probably doesn't exist at the moment' in terms of spirituality and teaching, and two years on, he still hoped to find that elusive, perfect, parish.

Although at the moment at which we spoke, Richard was feeling uncertain about his future, unsure whether his gifts and skills would be recognised by the Church

[386] Told that he would not be found a post, and freed to seek a curacy in another diocese.

and clearly very vulnerable to wondering if his vocation was currently achievable ('my mother is very worried I'm not going to get a job'), there was a clear sense that if the 'right' place was found for him, he would be able to set all these worries aside and concentrate on the future. He did express the desire to be allowed to concentrate on an achievably small part of parish ministry: 'I don't think [working with children] is what I'm called to do. Ideally after a year or so, I'd like to, if there is an evening service or one at another time, essentially be the main leader for that, and be sort of mentored in that, leading to something smaller than a parish,' but concerns about capability are common in those preparing to take up a new and daunting role. Richard's confidence might have been dented by the difficulty in finding a curacy, but his faith remained intact: 'it's actually been quite a good year for God.' I anticipated that when he took up a title post, this time of uncertainty would be reinterpreted as something that was of meaning because it allowed the movement away from previous, unrealistic assumptions and expectations, and into a place where God called him to learn and to flourish.

Similarly, Sarah was also released by her diocese, but this time on her own request. She felt that the need to look elsewhere had been clear, but still admitted that 'it would be nice to know where I'm going.' After a turbulent year (which will be further examined later), the location in which she would serve her title post seemed less important than dealing with some difficult personal and family issues, and seeking a curacy that would offer new opportunities rather

than fitting into previous models of experience had become increasingly important: ‘I’m finding it quite hard to work out what sort of thing I’m looking to go to, but I think my priorities are quite different now [than when I began the process of discernment].’ Judith, also waiting to find out if she had a title post to go to, retained a pragmatic attitude that was closely related to her lack of enthusiasm about her vocation (which she’d described as ‘grim’). ‘It’s just a huge uncertainty really,’ she said, ‘it is unsettling, but not in the ordinary sense, because if there’s no job at the end of it I can earn my money [by returning to my previous profession] and I’ll be in great demand.’ However, Judith’s sense of God’s presence in her life and in her vocation had been greatly enhanced by an overseas summer placement. ‘I really enjoyed it, and I didn’t expect to at all.’ With the knowledge that ministry didn’t have to be miserable (although she still hated the thought of being visible within the community), she was able to accept uncertainty with equanimity, and recognise that despite her inability always to recognise it, God did have ‘a future’ in mind. Judith, like others in this study, had found that lived experience (in the form of her summer placement) was more crucial than the theoretical investigative texts that formed the basis of her ministerial education. She still, however, held on to her initial understandings of what it was to be a priest, although with her reservations about the difficulties of ordained ministry it is difficult to term this an ‘ideal life.’ Like many others, Judith had grown in confidence as a result of a good placement, but it had not significantly changed her model of what priesthood looked like.

Facing disaster

For some ordinands, events or incidents during their training can seem to threaten their whole sense of self, of their vocation, and even of God's love. This can be particularly acute if their theology suggests that any deviation from their expectations of a seamless transition into ordained ministry must imply that God's powerful hand – for whatever reason – is no longer with them. In some cases it is problematic relationships that cause difficulties; the breakdown of trust between ordinands (who might be expected to share a common purpose and thereby adhere to the same values and standards of behaviour) or between an ordinand and training staff (who are in a position of authority and therefore deserving of respect) can be particularly painful. Two female ordinands at a residential college were sent with other students on a term's placement to work in a challenging Urban Priority Area parish in another diocese. The placement was not a success; argument and division broke out amongst the entire group and upon their return to college, the two female ordinands were summoned to discuss what had happened with the college Principal. One student described what had happened in this way:

> I found living in that area quite difficult. It was just one term, but I could feel myself getting lower and lower whilst I was there. I'm sure it was a good experience [in terms of learning] but I'm still working out what I learned there because I found it so difficult.

Her colleague had a different take on the experience:

> We were sent on a mission course this last year that fell apart for a number of reasons. A report was sent back that basically laid the blame on me and one other person, and said we were responsible for all the mismanagement and all the disagreement that happened, and actually that wasn't true. We were all tired, and they sent people away [on this placement] when they didn't want to go.

Both women appeared to be in denial about what had actually happened; one believing that it must have been a good experience but that depression had affected her full participation, and the other rejecting criticism of her behaviour whilst on placement by blaming the college for having unreasonable expectations.

Whilst the first ordinand said merely that it had been 'really difficult' to recover a sense of community after spending enforced time away on placement and coming back to adjust to a new year's intake at college ('more people are going off to their families, and there seems to be more angst about rotas and this and that'), the second student was angry that she felt unsupported by the college staff:

> that experience showed up just a complete lack of pastoral support that happens at college…the other person that's named in the report is having a lot of counselling…I waited until last week to say, 'excuse me, I still remain uncounselled,' and that feels like a gap since I've come back.

This particular ordinand had a complex religious background, and had not had a straightforward experience of discernment of her vocation. She was inclined as a result to measure the Church of England's processes against those employed by other faith communities, and to be critical of what she understood as failings in authority and leadership. She had been offered a curacy, but confessed that the only reason she had accepted the post was because of her high opinion of her future training incumbent. If he too failed to live up to her expectations – the 'ideal lives' model she held of priesthood – then further disappointment was likely. It was difficult to predict the outcome for the first ordinand; the fact that she was in need of counselling suggested bigger issues than the simple failure of a college placement, but the fact that she was able to ask for and accept guidance implied the desire to learn and change. In fact, later contact revealed that both ordinands had experienced significant difficulties in their curacies and in relationships with their training incumbents.

For another group of ordinands, problems within the community of their residential college caused embarrassment and disillusion. A series of difficulties was reported with some relish in the national press, resulting in a high level of

public visibility and prurient local interest in college matters. Those particularly distressed by events were students holding a firmly Evangelical theology, who interpreted (sometimes unconsciously) events either as a form of divinely-sanctioned cleansing, or as a result of the failure of certain people to listen to God's wishes. If they believed that God was active in the world, and that God had a purpose and a plan for each of them and for their theological college, then they were forced to make sense of what had happened in terms of God's intention rather than as a result of human failings or weakness. A male student did his best to hold together his previous experience in the secular business world and his theological expectations: 'I can see why changes had to be made [at a functional level], and I can see why people would be resistant to change' he explained, but 'when you move into something, very quickly you should be asking God, how long do you want me here?' Change had, in his view, been necessary as a response to secular pressures, but the problems it had caused were a direct result of some members of the community not asking the right questions of God.

A female student at the college, who had been particularly keen to preserve her privacy and anonymity within the residential community, found local scrutiny to be 'a huge pain in the neck. I've even had people stop me in the street when I've had my college fleece on, and I just got rattled by that.' Like her fellow ordinand above, she felt that although she had good relationships with people involved in the dispute, 'some of them needed to go…change had to come.'

She did admit that ‘a lot of people had been hurt very badly,’ meaning both students and staff, but justified what had happened as being for the long-term good of the community. Another ordinand told me, with some understatement, that ‘being caught up in college politics is never fun,’ but like his colleagues insisted on looking forward and was reluctant to talk too much about what had occurred. There was uneasiness in discussing not only the background to events, or the personalities involved (which could reflect an admirable desire not to gossip or to lay blame in one direction), but also in talking about the effect that what had happened had upon the community. It seemed that a directive not to talk to the press about college matters, and what one ordinand described as ‘pressure to represent the place positively,’ had been interpreted as an official clamp-down on *any* discussion of events. Although the students in this study were determined to be positive about the future of the college, there was a clear sense that they had been unable to effectively process how they felt about the situation, or to express their disappointment in the failures of community. A female ordinand said that she refused to think about it: ‘that’s just too much for me to be dealing with at the moment, I’ve got enough on my own plate to deal with.’ The danger was that each student would carry into their future ministries the sense that denial and secrecy was an appropriate response to a traumatic breakdown of working relationships, and residual anger that they had been let down by the staff who were supposed to be shaping their approaches to ministry. ‘It feels like there’s a lack of integrity here, and that feels really hard,’ said one of them.

For two ordinands in this research project, particular personal circumstances threatened to blight their training experience and to undermine their faith in their calling. Sarah had taken a long time to accept her vocation, and after a complex journey through the selection process, put the needs of her family above her own desires when choosing a theological college. Unlike some of the male students, she had never considered living apart from the family whilst studying; her 'prior call' to be a wife and mother, and her discomfort that despite her gender (which clashed with her traditional understanding of appropriate roles in the church) it was she that had been selected for ordination training and not her husband, meant that she was determined for them to continue living together during her time in college. However, her final year in residential training was marked by a series of tragedies. There were deaths amongst family and close friends, some completely unexpected and traumatic, and then difficulties within the family itself. Some of Sarah's children – the main reason for her moving to this particular location – formed what she considered to be unhealthy relationships. Sarah was left wondering if her decision to move the family had caused this chain of events, or if in some way her pursuit of a vocation to ordained ministry was being shown to be inappropriate.

Although Sarah was devastated by family issues (it wasn't until a further interview a year later that she was able to talk more clearly about what had happened), three factors enabled her to retain her faith, which she admitted

might otherwise have been lost, and to continue her studies towards ordination. There was the fact that she had just returned from a good summer placement, and through it had been exposed to a wider theological and spiritual understanding. She had found that being treated as an informed expert when arranging family funerals had made her 'really inhabit' her vocation instead of thinking about it in purely theoretical terms. And she had prayed about the situation within her immediate family, and had come to an adequate solution for what had happened:

> I was walking down the road the other day, and saying to God, 'why did you bring me here?...and I just felt God say, 'to prepare you for ministry and that calling.' And that's what I'm doing, not despite the tough stuff, but actually through it, but that's not what I thought I was signing up for!

Although events were painful, Sarah found an explanation for them that enabled her to retain a sense of God's involvement in her life. She believed herself 'more called to ministry and more called to priesthood than I was last year,' and convinced that it was vital to 'live in the presence of God with the questions' when trying to discover God's purpose. She drew a clear distinction between what she was encouraged to believe at college ('everything is so much about having answers') and what she had experienced whilst on placement. Because she had worn a cassock for much of the time – an unfamiliar experience – she had been treated by many people as if she were already ordained. As a result

of this, and of her growing familiarity with the challenging environment of her midweek placement, she was beginning to feel that what was crucial was 'inhabiting what God's calling me to.' The theory she learned at college did not seem to be as influential in shaping her understanding of priesthood as the combination of prayer and practical experience. Although her 'ideal lives' model of priesthood had been expanded by her exposure to catholic culture and practice, academic studies at theological college – the 'investigative texts' that are intended to help the process of formation – appeared to have had little effect.

Paul, also a full-time student at an Evangelical college, had entered training with exceptionally high hopes of both the college itself and his future ministry. He believed that God was calling him to a public ministry alongside a well-known evangelist, and had given up a well-paid career in order to prepare for ordination. Although the first weeks in training had been more difficult than he had expected ('I'm a slow starter [but] then I get very good at what I do'), he was determined that he was in the right place, with the best possible teachers, and that with God alongside, all would be well. A year later, the picture was very different. A prolonged period of illness, which appeared to have been made worse by what Paul described as 'burnout,' meant that he spent his summer in bed, unable to undertake a placement, and reliant upon other students to look after him. 'I'm in a very dark place; I'm finding it very hard at the moment,' he told me. In order to avoid confronting some painful issues both within the

college community and in his sense of calling – it had been harder than he had expected to leave behind the glamour and income associated with his old life and settle into residential training – Paul had been deliberately keeping busy (he described his actions at trying to 'anaesthetise the pain'). Worse still than physical weakness and enforced contemplation was his sense that God was 'very silent.'

Unable to pray, unable to read the Bible, suffering 'the most amount of [spiritual] pain I've ever been through,' Paul began the first term of his final year's training knowing that he did not yet have a title post in which to serve a curacy, recognising that he was lonely, feeling isolated within a college community consisting of many young families, and believing that he had been abandoned by his former church, his sending bishop and his DDO because none of them had kept contact since he had begun training. He had no energy to work, study or exercise, and he was thoroughly miserable:

> I can't leave, because God's called me to it, but I don't want to be here because I'm in pain. It's like being on the cross, that's all I can describe it [as]; I want to get off, but that's the only place I have to be.

Paul's college staff told him to take time to recover, and some suggested that his illness was a form of spiritual testing and growth, a 'dark night of the soul' as

described by the medieval mystic St John of the Cross.[387] Although this gave Paul a way of retaining faith throughout God's apparent absence, his lack of exposure to the spiritual classics (which might have been more familiar to someone with a catholic heritage) meant that he was left feeling angry that no-one had warned him that periods of doubt and spiritual darkness were commonplace: 'it was like they expected it, they weren't surprised, which was quite frustrating. It's like they kept it secret.' Of more practical help to Paul was his GP, whom he finally went to visit because he was unable to sleep. She diagnosed post-viral depression, prescribed anti-depressants, and told him that there was a physical cause to his symptoms. He rapidly began to notice a difference.

Although the concept of the 'dark night of the soul' proved helpful to Paul, it is possible that some of his college tutors were anxious, within a theological understanding that suggests that all things, including suffering, are imposed by God for a good purpose, to point him towards a spiritual rather than a physical explanation for the events of the summer. Few of Paul's underlying issues about his calling – his life before he came to theological college, his relationship with his family, his ambition to achieve public success and recognition in ministry, and the competitive nature of his previous careers – had been addressed by his theological training, and the rapidity with which he was found a

[387] 'The saint describes how a mystic loses every earthly attachment, passing through a personal experience of Jesus' crucifixion to a rhapsodic union with God's glory. To pass through this darkness is, he says, 'a fortunate adventure to union with the Beloved.'' Bentley, 1997 p.240

new midweek placement with a religious community who reinforced the mystical nature of his illness ('to them, this kind of experience is necessary and part of the process') did not encourage further examination of the past or of his mental or physical health. Paul himself believed that he was being 'disciplined' by God for a benevolent purpose: 'the Word tells you, no child likes to be disciplined by his father, and though they hate it, it's for their own good.'

There was some sense that being forced to accept his own vulnerability had been, at least in part, a positive experience ('I thought they'd kick me out if I didn't come up trumps…the world I come from rejects weakness, where the church is not fazed by it at all'), but Paul still talked about the 'need to be broken' by God. He hoped that any future training incumbent would 'nurture' him through what he expected to be a long-term experience of darkness, and talked about the scriptural precedent for a deacon needing to be 'tested' before being appointed. 'I haven't got a lot to be excited about at the moment,' he said, but 'God's doing all the things he's promised to do…[for] my own good.' Family members had expressed concerns about whether his calling could be right for him, as it had made him so ill, and Paul had responded to them in terms of divinely-imposed 'punishment' and 'suffering':

> They don't quite understand God's way, they're not all Christians, so they don't understand why it has to happen. They don't understand what the cross means to a person, why we die in our own lives.

He confessed that God was still ‘very close but very silent,’ and that he was ‘waiting and looking forward to the resurrection life.’ Theological training had been, and continued to be, a painful experience that he couldn’t wait to leave behind.

Although Paul had entered training with expectations that might have been considered unrealistic, he had begun theological education with enormous enthusiasm and energy, and a desire to further the mission of the Church. It was always unlikely that the Church would find him a curacy that would allow him to work alongside a public evangelist – new curates are usually given experience that will develop the skills for future parish ministries, and specialisation comes after the basics have been learned – but it was quite feasible that he could have been given increasing levels of responsibility in a large Evangelical church with a significant ministry of outreach and teaching. But instead of gradually reshaping his ideas of what the future might hold, the combination of discord within the college community, which appeared to have taken up much of the energies of its teaching staff, stress, illness and physical exhaustion had left Paul vulnerable, depressed and uncertain. Instead of formation, he had experienced destruction. He worried that he might not choose the right title post, that he might be asked to go to the ‘wrong’ church, that his health would not be strong enough to cope with the demands placed upon him, and that he might do something ‘stupid’ that would ‘embarrass the rest of the

Church.' Instead of wanting to work in the public arena (and using the presentation skills learned in his secular career), Paul hoped to find somewhere which would be a 'safe place' and where there would be a supportive team of clergy around him. However, his model of 'ideal' ministry did not seem to have changed significantly; he still talked about the 'high expectations' held of *leaders* in the Church. 'Sometimes we can't lay things down,' he admitted, 'but God wrestles them off us.' Although Paul did not feel equal to the task he had originally dreamed of undertaking, it was still the desire to 'help to reach the ends of the earth with physical gifts and spiritual gifts' that he talked about. His understanding of what priesthood is had not been significantly shaped by his time at theological college, but his self-belief and his trust in God's enabling had been severely eroded.

Conclusions

The majority of ordinands come out of their theological training adequately equipped with the skills, knowledge and confidence that will enable them to begin working as curates. The Church does not expect them to leave the initial phase of ministerial training fully equipped for a lifetime's ministry; practical skills will be learned and reinforced in the parish, formal academic learning will continue throughout the curacy and will be encouraged beyond that point, and the experience of living as a member of the clergy will help them to internalise an identity of priesthood. Training is, however, a uniquely intense period in

which the development of skills and knowledge is set against the deliberate shaping of each individual to reflect both the character of the Church and of Christ.[388] The transition from one stage of being – as a member of the laity – to being an ordained minister is marked by the formal rite of passage that is ordination, but has been facilitated by the prolonged period of training that instils not only measurable skills and knowledge, but also forms the possibility of a new way of existence and a new identity.

The Archbishop of Canterbury describes training as encouraging 'a stewardship of time that refuses to be pushed into patterns which are dominantly functional, that assumes training to be about growth at least as much as skills and covering a syllabus.'[389] Church tradition might affect the way in which this process is expressed; those with a functional understanding of ministry might object to the ontological suppositions of the term 'formation', but the life-long nature of the priestly character (unlike other service-based professions, one does not cease to become a priest because one has stopped actively *ministering* as a priest) implies that each ordinand must be open to the possibility of being changed by God – of growing into priesthood - through the process of training and in the subsequent practice of ministry as well as by the act of ordination itself.[390]

[388] Sarah Coakley puts it this way: 'The priest acts *in persona Ecclesiae* in acting also *in persona Christi.* Sarah Coakley, 'Fresh Paths in Systematic Theology' in Shortt, 2005 p.81
[389] *'The Christian Priest Today': lecture on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Ripon College Cuddesdon* p.11
[390] This is not to suggest that the individuality of each person is lost in the process, but rather that personal gifts, skills and abilities are developed and encouraged to flourish.

For some ordinands, however, the training process is particularly painful or ineffective. The stories above may relate some unusually traumatic reactions to the experience of ministerial education, but the fact that several difficult stories were related within a relatively small research group must give pause for thought. It would be quite wrong to expect that training, which is deliberately demanding, should be a universally positive experience, and most ordinands would point to aspects of their time in college or course that faced them with unwelcome truths about themselves, challenged their self-confidence, or tested their academic abilities. When this happens within a supportive community, within the confines of an adequate theological and spiritual framework, and in a context of growth and love, it can enable positive change and increased understanding of the vocation and the self. Nick, for example, described a period of 'spiritual desolation' related to difficulties with his title post, but believed that throughout this he had the 'whole sort of spiritual support of the college' and the encouragement of academic staff. Paul, in contrast, felt isolated, alone and neglected throughout his 'dark night of the soul,' and seemed likely to leave training without resolving many of the issues raised by his experiences.

Anthropological researchers, viewing Christian communities as discrete subjects of study, have suggested that the Christian belief in the possibility of radical change is both a 'salvational necessity' and a way of constituting a unique identity based on the history of the faith, where a decisive break with the past (in the form of Judaic practice) took place. This 'radical discontinuity' is

fundamental to conversion narratives, and, I would suggest, is a crucial aspect of preparation for ordained ministry.[391] Ordinands are prepared, through study, prayer, practice and by belonging to a like-minded community, to make a break with their past, to leave behind their status as lay Christians, and to take on the very public role of a priest. They are also intentionally 'formed' to undertake the tasks and duties required of them by the Church, and to represent the Church in an appropriate and acceptable manner. Their callings may have been individual, but their employment is corporate.

Although I had expected that the period of training, whether in a residential college or on a part-time local course, would help to reshape the initial dreams of ministry (the 'ideal lives' that inspired the early vocation) into a more realistic form aided by study of academic writings about ministry ('investigative texts'), this did not seem to be the experience of the respondents to this study. In the majority of cases, they still clung to the models of priesthood that had sustained them thus far, and did not seem to reshape them as a result of their training. The context in which ordinands are trained for ministry is perhaps more significant than the content of their training. Pastoral placements during training offered the opportunity to ground learning in practice, and some students found the exposure to new forms of ministry enabled them to begin appreciating what it might be like for them to live and practice as a priest. What did preoccupy the majority of ordinands was the concern whether or not they had chosen the 'right'

[391] See Robbins, 'Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture' in *Current Anthropology*, vol 48, no. 1, February 2007 pp. 10,11. Robbins draws on the work of Hooker and Badiou amongst others.

place to be; a place where they would learn and grow; a place that would affirm that they had correctly heard their calling to priesthood; a place that developed their gifts and enabled them to flourish. Few ordinands expected their initial ministerial training to be easy, but they did expect that they would be part of a godly community in which learning and development was encouraged to take place. Some questioned if this had indeed been so.

It is clear that even relatively minor setbacks can badly dent the confidence of individuals still coming to terms with what vocation will mean for themselves and for their families and friends. It is possible to cope with quite challenging situations if the individual has the resources to adapt previous experience or understandings in the light of what is happening to them, but this requires adequate intellectual, spiritual and personal frameworks that allow the maintenance of a sense of self-awareness and faith even in the midst of apparent chaos and disintegration. 'Events' (in anthropological terms) can allow transition to more mature expressions of faith and individuality, but they can also threaten to destroy confidence in vocation and, in extreme cases, in God. To leave training with unresolved issues and understandings – as seemed to be the case for some of the ordinands in this study - risks intensifying the vulnerability that so often accompanies ordained ministry. As they moved into the next stage of their journeys, by beginning to serve their title posts as newly-ordained deacons, I was anxious to discover it they had been sent out with adequate resources to face the challenges of parish life and whether the 'boundary

markers' that they had studied would enable them to maintain appropriate divisions between their personal and public personas.

Chapter 6

Integration

Introduction

Ordination marks the beginning of a new way of life. Travels are not yet completed, but there has been a shift in the nature of the journey. For stipendiary clergy, a working life beckons where the vocational nature of the employment implies continual availability and public visibility. For part-time self-supporting ministers (SSMs), prior responsibilities, which can involve demanding secular employment, have to be balanced with the new duties associated with also being a member of the clergy. The ordination service itself emphasises difference: candidates put on a clerical collar; they dress in formal robes; they make binding vows in front of their bishop, his legal representative and the congregation; hands are laid upon them and the power of the Holy Spirit invoked; and they are 'clothed' in the stole of a deacon or a priest.[392] The

[392] The usual practice in the Church of England is to ordain first to the diaconate, usually followed a year later by ordination to the priesthood.

concept of historical continuity and tradition is invoked, reminding candidates that they are part of a line stretching back to Christ himself, and assent to the 39 Articles of Religion and the making of an Oath of Allegiance to the Sovereign emphasises the Established nature of the Church of England. They vow obedience to their bishop 'in all things lawful and honest,' and promise, as far as is in their power, that not only they, but also their families will attempt to conform to the example set by Christ. The weight of ecclesiastical, civil and spiritual expectation placed upon them is a foretaste of the expectations that are still to come from parishioners and critics alike. Newly ordained men and women have to rapidly assimilate a new identity and adapt to their representative role and the assumptions that it raises in the minds of those they meet. Effective integration of the personal and the public is crucial.

Davies and Guest's study of bishops and their families described ordination as a 'divine calling expressed both bureaucratically through the church's selection procedures and liturgically through the rite of ordination;' an act which both affirms and legitimates vocation.[393] Ordination may well give both validity and substance to individuals' vocations, but it also pushes them out into a world in which, although their training is not yet complete, they are expected to function both as official representatives and as autonomous practitioners. Yvonne Warren points out that ordained clergy 'joined a religious dogma, but became part of the workforce;'[394] in order to cope with the potentially isolating nature of

[393] Davies and Guest, 2007 p.79
[394] Warren, 2002 p.207

their calling and with the often conflicting demands they face, they need to feel sufficiently supported by the Church and those given authority over them. They also need to maintain a sense of the self that was called by God, otherwise they risk losing authenticity in their practice and expression of their vocation.

It has become commonplace to theorise that in contemporary British society, the Church of England is increasingly viewed as unimportant or irrelevant. Secularism and anti-clericalism finds voice in the widely-reported writings of such 'new atheists' as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, whilst even the faithful might not be as visible or as active as in previous generations; Grace Davie asserts that most people in Britain now 'express their religious sentiments by staying away from, rather than going to, their places of worship.'[395] When Ellen Clark-King studied congregations in deprived areas of the North-East of England, she came to the conclusion that church provided 'continuity and the comfort of the familiar'[396] rather than inspiring worshippers to be transformed and challenged. Yet clergy must work within existing cultural and social contexts, even if these challenge the very faith that inspires and sustains them, or foster suspicion of their abilities and motives.[397] The previous chapters have examined the way in which vocations to ordained ministry are recognised, shaped and developed, and the vulnerability of those preparing for ordination to feelings of inadequacy about their abilities to adequately represent God and the

[395] Davie, 1994 p.2
[396] Clark-King, 2004 p.54
[397] Billings gives the example of the Hillsborough disaster, where the arrival of clergy offering pastoral support was viewed with 'intense suspicion' by professional care-providers such as social workers. Billings, 2010 p.122

Church to the world. I have suggested that throughout their journeys towards priesthood, many ordinands hold onto unrealistic visions of what ordained ministry is like and what the 'ideal model' of a priest should be, and discovered that the process of academic education, training and formation does little to alter the initial vision of priesthood. It does seem that practical experience, discovered primarily through placements and pastoral situations, can be valuable in helping individuals to more fully inhabit the concept of priesthood, but that there is a danger that over-idealism means that some ordinands enter ministry without the resources they need in order to flourish.

As the previous chapter demonstrated, formal pre-ordination training, whether on a local course or at a residential theological college, has to cover a great deal of ground in a short period of time. Whilst the aim is to provide a foundation in all the necessary academic aspects of ordained ministry, and to offer practical experience of a variety of tasks and understandings, both theological educators themselves, and the Church as institution, expect that learning will continue beyond the initial phase of training. This may take place in courses provided by the diocese, be sought out from other providers by an individual aware of specific areas of need or interest, be acquired through self-directed study and reading, or involve prayer, reflection, and discussion with trusted friends or colleagues. There will also be less overt learning opportunities in the day-to-day experiences of living in the parish as a member of the clergy. The expectations of parishioners, the demands of church-goers, the hopes of friends and family,

assumptions of the general public: all help to form a vision of what priesthood is in each particular context and setting. Clergy have not only to read the landscape around them, but have also to acknowledge that it has the power to shape them.

For the newly-ordained deacon, much has to be learned very rapidly about the practice of ministry. It is crucial that effective patterns of work and life are set in order to maintain an appropriate balance between the public and the private, the corporate and the individual; although the vocation is to serve God through the medium of the Church, the ordained individual is also valuable to God and may have prior responsibilities to a spouse and family. Christian ethicist Darlene Weaver suggests that in proper relationship with faith, 'love for God, self and neighbour are dynamically inter-related.'[398] Over-commitment to the vocation, where self-sacrifice is always given priority over personal well-being, can result in resentment and burnout. Faith asks *all* Christians, not only priests, to be prepared to live in a sacrificial manner, but to base a vocation purely on the practice of self-sacrifice risks tipping over into pride, elitism and masochism. (If the Church bases its planning on the assumption that the ministerial life must *always* be sacrificial, then the self-giving that is the choice of the individual to offer when appropriate has instead been demanded, and the sense of freely-offered gift has been destroyed.) The earlier examination of texts on theology and priesthood identified 'boundary markers' that help us to recognise and grapple with issues of power, authority, truth, desire and identity. Foremost

[398] Weaver, 2002 p.8

amongst these are works of feminist theory and theology, but as the previous chapter discovered, such texts are not part of the regular syllabus in theological training for ordained ministry. If the recently-ordained are to effectively adapt to the realities of parish ministry, they need effective boundary markers of their own. How they discover and implement these is my next focus of attention.

Starting out

Choosing the parish

Finding a suitable parish in which to serve a curacy is, for many ordinands, a source of anxiety as well as excitement. Should they accept a parish in which they don't feel immediately at home, because it will offer new opportunities and experiences, or should they try to find somewhere that suits their gifts and 'fits' with their dreams of what parish ministry should be? Is the purpose of the curacy to learn as much as possible whilst under the supervision of a more experienced priest, or just a first step where confidence should grow at a gentle pace? How important are peripheral issues such as facilities for families, transport links, a comfortable house and the opportunities for leisure activities within or outside the parish? And is there really a choice, or does the nature of vocation imply that the newly-ordained should go where they are sent?

The offers of title parishes are made by sponsoring bishops, usually after consultation with the training institution (which will have submitted reports detailing candidates' strengths and weaknesses, the individuals' preferences for their first parish, and what the institution feels would be most helpful for each ordinand's future development) and with the Diocesan Director of Ordinands, who will have overseen the trajectory from discernment through to the end of training. Some dioceses sponsor more candidates for training than they have available training posts (these are often the more prosperous dioceses, who will undertake to cover initial training costs in order to benefit the wider Church)[399] and although their ordinands will be aware that they cannot be guaranteed a curacy in their home diocese, to be told to look elsewhere can feel like a rejection. The Diocese of course tries to find the best post possible for each candidate – it is to no-one's advantage if a curacy breaks down – but there are practical factors influencing the decisions they make. Parishes are invited to 'bid' for curates, but then a complex decision-making process will consider the potential benefit to both curate and parish, whether there is suitable accommodation available, if the incumbent will provide adequate supervision, and if there is likely to be a good working relationship between the curate and the training incumbent. This can be a remarkably subjective process; bishops may view some parishes as 'always' getting a curate and doing a good job of training them, whilst others might prioritise the needs of a struggling parish and its overstretched vicar over the careful nurturing of a newly-ordained deacon.

[399] There is of course also a benefit to these 'exporting dioceses,' in that they can then choose to which of their ordinands they wish to offer title posts.

Ordinands often choose to believe that their bishop has carefully found exactly the right place for them (Rebecca told me that she had been 'relying on the discernment of the bishop and the diocese'), but the reality is that each suggestion will involve elements of compromise.

Respondents to this study had been carefully taught by their colleges ('it's drummed into us') that a good relationship with the training incumbent is vital to the success of a curacy. In some cases that led ordinands to accept parishes not because of the opportunities they offered, but because they hoped for support from the incumbent. Rebecca, preparing to move to a parish that was 'a lot richer' than she had expected, said, 'if it wasn't for the relationship I think I have with the vicar, then I wouldn't go to the parish,' and Martha, explaining that her future training incumbent had been her childhood vicar, described him as 'funny and incredibly intelligent,' and was looking forward to working with someone for whom she had enormous respect, 'I think I've really fallen on my feet with this one.' First impressions of course can be deceptive, and making a relatively short visit to a parish in order to meet the training incumbent and assess whether or not this is somewhere to which you are called to serve, cannot possibly reveal what it will be like to work closely with (or for) someone over a three or four year period, what the realities of the parish situation are, and how relationships will stand up to pressure or conflict. Nevertheless, the assumption that the training incumbent would ensure that the curacy would be a positive experience, sets up expectations that in some cases would not be met.

It appeared that, much as when exploring vocation, for some ordinands, images of ‘perfect’ priesthood – ‘ideal lives’ – could influence the way in which their future training incumbents were viewed as well as setting up expectations about what ministry would be like.

There did appear to be some theological differences in approach when finding a curacy. Several Evangelical students had very definite ideas about the elements that needed to be in place in order for them to accept a title post. Richard, for example, was ‘released’ by his diocese to look elsewhere after he was uncertain about the parish they offered him:

> I was fairly willing to try, but once I’d done two weekends to look at it, I was still in two minds, partly because of my relationship with the incumbent, I wasn’t sure how that would work, and also [because] it was so different to what I’d expected to go in to…small groups don’t work, you can’t do meeting up with people in the pub to study the Bible, that doesn’t work.

There were clear elements that Richard felt would be essential to his future ministry, and upon which he was unwilling to compromise. Even though he admitted to being unsettled by being one of the few of his year group not yet to have secured a curacy, he maintained that he was still ‘not sure at what point I’ll go, ‘well, actually I’ll take this job.’’ Other Evangelical ordinands referred to

essential aspects of their future ministries: ‘a missionary kind of emphasis,’ being in ‘a larger church,’ and having a training incumbent who will offer ‘good teaching.’ For each of them, a clear image of what their ordained ministry would look like led to equally clear visions of where they should – or perhaps more pertinently should *not* - serve their first post.

Evangelical women had very specific issues to deal with. Judith, who remained unenthusiastic about her vocation to priesthood throughout training, insisted that her theology required her to have a male training incumbent (although as a single woman, she would also want to ‘make sure that the incumbent’s wife’s not going to be unduly suspicious or worrying’) and that there would have to be ‘clear agreements about specific responsibilities, procedures, how information is shared…[and] clear agreement about time off.’ Headship issues, she believed, would influence not only where she served her title post, but the remainder of her ministry: ‘I would rather work in a team situation…I believe in the teaching about man and woman and having authority as a man and so on.’ When she accepted a title post, she admitted that it was ‘the only one’ she had found; ‘it’s very hard [for Evangelical women] to find a place. The ones that I’d like to go to theologically probably wouldn’t want a woman, and if they say they’re open to women, when it comes to it…’ Sarah, who had been exposed to catholic practice during her summer placement, began to consider seeking a title post in a non-Evangelical setting, partly because she had learned to value sacrament

and spirituality, but also because of concerns about the way in which she would be viewed by Evangelical churches:

> On a very practical basis, I think it's probably the more conservative churches that would be prepared to take people from [this college], and that's not where I am spiritually. And actually, most of the more conservative churches are looking for men. Fortunately, my DDO is a woman!

Clashes of expectation made it difficult for women with a conservative theology to remain true to their theological understandings and their sense of calling by God to a ministry that must involve leadership. This divergence of vocation and belief did not appear to have been addressed at all during their training within an Evangelical setting.

More catholic ordinands, in contrast, struggled not with the detail of potential curacies, but with the need for obedience and trust. Lydia realised that she had issues related to the links between the Church, Establishment and the monarchy, and that although she respected her future training incumbent and was excited about her curacy, she had questions about maintaining her identity 'and being myself.' James also raised the issue of identity:

> when someone's ordained, part of what they then relate to people with is being ordained rather than being themselves…so whatever your intention or my intention might be, I just get the feeling that a bit of it's out of control.

Already aware of potential difficulties between himself and his training incumbent (a tutor at college had pointed out that they were quite similar in their approaches, and another priest had described the incumbent as 'over-forceful'), James nevertheless felt, after prayer and reflection, that it was the 'right' place, and that 'there were always risks.' Jonathan, although hoping for 'a big town, good size parish,' similarly believed that he was 'in the hands of others' when it came to finding a curacy. For all three, their vocation was largely to follow where they were called to be, and to trust that God would be at its heart.

Nick, who had appeared to move very smoothly through training after many years in a demanding secular career, had been brought up in a clergy family and felt that he understood the demands of the Church. He had been offered a curacy which he intended to accept, and believed that he would be able to work well with his future training incumbent. However, the practical details of life in the parish were causing real difficulty:

> I spent the summer in a period of real desolation…the last thing that my wife and I expected to be an issue was housing. We'd looked at the

> house that we were offered and it was too small…the diocese couldn't make an offer of a [better] house, and even when they could make an offer of a house, the agreement was to rent somewhere and we still hadn't actually got somewhere to live.

Reflecting on the experience, Nick recognised that the difficulties with housing had raised two issues: the effect on his family (who had lived apart from him during training and now seemed to be faced with a further period of separation), and the recognition that his vocation had led him to be reliant upon the actions of others rather than trusting to his own abilities: 'I was powerless, I couldn't do anything to sort out the house…it [was] a powerful theological lesson to learn.'

Whilst ordinands proceeding to full-time posts were speculating on what their future ministries in new parishes might involve, students training on local courses were predominantly planning to return to their home churches. Deborah, married to a priest, was relieved that her bishop had agreed that she could do her curacy in her husband's parish, which 'feels like completely the right thing.' Because she was in full-time secular employment, and expected (at least until she retired) that her formal ministry would have to be conducted mainly at weekends, she thought that it would be impossible to be 'the vicar's wife in one [parish] and in demand in another.' Ordination, for Deborah, was not expected to involve what she described as 'the life-changingness' experienced by other trainee ministers; she also held a fairly functional view of ordination,

theorising that sacramental authority was a question of church order rather than ontology: ‘I don’t feel that intrinsically it has to be a priest who celebrates communion except that if it wasn’t, it could be anybody.’ David, also training on a part-time course, had been leading a church plant for some time, and was to continue his relationship with that worshipping community. He was reluctant to accept that ordination might significantly change his role (‘I believe in the priesthood of the church, you know, everybody who’s in the church…I hope people won’t start looking at me differently’) and expected that ‘initially it might not be that different, because we’re leading the church anyway.’ Ordination would enable another facet of his leadership, so that he could lead services of Holy Communion, marry and baptise members of his congregation ‘without having to go to the Bishop to make sure it’s OK,’ but church life would continue much as it had for some time. ‘I’ve [already] done two four-year curacies really,’ David said.

Only one respondent from a local course, Nicola, a clergy wife, had arranged to do a curacy in a parish some distance from where she lived and normally worshipped. Unlike the other part-time students, who were to become self-supporting ministers, she had been selected for full-time stipendiary ministry, but chose to train on a course rather than residentially because she was working full-time to supplement the family income. Both she and her diocese had agreed that she needed the breadth of experience that would be gained in an unfamiliar

setting, and that it would be beneficial for her curacy to be supervised by a priest other than her husband. She admitted that the title parish was 'convenient geographically' by being within easy commuting distance of home, but had been quite selective in the process, considering two other parishes before accepting one that 'just felt right.' Her husband was supportive of her vocation and expected that she would in the future want to have her own parish rather than spending her career as his assistant curate. There were some practical difficulties, such as trying to co-ordinate days off ('we miss each other, we don't see each other very much') but both felt that they managed to balance work and marriage 'pretty well.' Nicola had children who were old enough to be fairly independent, whilst young enough to expect to complete her curacy and probably two major jobs after that; it was important to her and to the diocese that had sponsored her training that she was enabled to gain as much experience as possible during her curacy. There was an underlying assumption that she needed to be 'properly' trained in her curacy because her ministry would be fully deployable and full-time. The expectations placed upon curates and the opportunities given them can reveal assumptions made by the Church about their future ministries.

There is pressure on ordinands of all church practice and from all training routes to obtain a curacy, no matter what, because without a place in which to serve their title – without a parish to which they are appointed – they cannot be ordained. Delaying ordination by a year, in order to find the best title post

possible, is unusual; ordinands have often spent many years preparing for this moment, they have friends and family waiting anxiously to see the culmination of all their hard work, they may have a desire to be ordained alongside their friends and colleagues and they want to get on with the task to which they have been called. Sometimes external circumstances, such as illness or an interruption to studies, cause ordination to be put off, but this is usually imposed from above. It is rare for it to be requested by an individual, and for stipendiary ordinands, there are financial and practical implications in not immediately taking up a title post: training grants come to an end, college accommodation has to be vacated or rent paid, and the expected stipendiary income will not materialise. Penny Jamieson, former bishop of Dunedin, has written that vocations are shaped by the 'available possibilities.'[400] The history of women's ordination demonstrates clearly the way in which women who believed themselves called to priesthood found their gifts instead channelled into work with children, in pastoral visiting, as deaconesses or as clergy wives,[401] and it is apparent that vocations continue to be influenced by 'possibilities' beyond the initial stages of discernment and training. The type of parish in which individuals serve their curacies, and the examples demonstrated by their training incumbents, offer not just specific opportunities for practice and growth, but also combine to reinforce personal understandings or uncertainties.

[400] Jamieson, 1997 p.47
[401] See for example Bernice Broggio's story in Barr, 2001 p.80 or the description of Una Kroll's journey from 'medical doctor, missionary, deaconess, deacon, Christian feminist, author and broadcaster' to priest at the age of 71, in Rees, 2002 p.35

Although the decision to ordain a candidate is technically the province of their bishop alone, in practice, the majority of ordinands who successfully complete their courses of training are recommended for ordination. The Church is reluctant to refuse to ordain a candidate unless there are exceptionally grave reasons for doing so, such as the discovery of criminal or abusive behaviour. Some ordinands in this study had expressed significant doubts about their calling or their ability to function in a parish situation, but they all proceeded seamlessly towards ordination. Torry suggests that the visibility of the priesthood within communities means that the role is not simply about what the clergy *do*, but 'what they *are*.'[402] If the newly-ordained are clearly unhappy or uncomfortable with their vocation or in their training parishes, it is possible that they will damage both themselves and the way in which the Church is understood by the wider community. The Church might choose to take risks in those whom it ordains and in the places they are sent to as they begin ministry, trusting that God and experience will help shape them into appropriately priestly figures. There is a danger, however, that if they are fundamentally unsuited to either their parish or their calling, widespread hurt will follow. It is not always kind to give the benefit of the doubt.

Becoming a deacon

The Church of England usually ordains its new clergy first as deacons, and expects them to spend a year getting to know their parish before being ordained

[402] Torry, 2004 p.161. My italics.

as priest. The order of the diaconate is ancient and well-respected, and a few people continue to be ordained as 'permanent' deacons, but for the majority of candidates, it is a transitional ministry. Deacons are responsible for pastoral care and encouragement; they may, with permission, conduct baptisms and funerals (and can take weddings although they cannot give the priestly blessing at the end of the service), and are often involved in teaching, pastoral visiting and in forging links with the local community. The website of the Diaconal Association suggests that deacons should have a ministry 'that is outward looking, community based and which leads others out into service beyond the congregational membership.'[403]

Diaconal ministry emphasises service and humility. The threefold order of ministry in Anglican tradition means that as individuals are called into new forms of ordained ministry, they carry with them the character of their previous ordination, hence a priest is still a deacon, and a bishop retains the character of a deacon and a priest. However, in practice, it can be hard for ordinands convinced that they have a vocation to priesthood to understand why they have to spend a year being not quite what they were called to be. This might be affected by theological understanding and personal history; Paul Heelas' identification of the faithful as 'converts' and 'spiritual seekers' suggests that converts 'have adopted a tradition which *spells out* what *has* to be changed,' whilst seekers are happy to be 'engaged in unfolding exploration.'[404] If Heelas is

[403] Paul Avis, quoted at www.dace.org/deacons/vocation.shtml accessed 16 August 2010
[404] Paul Heelas, 'Turning Within' in Percy, 2000 p.67

correct, ‘converts’ could long to be involved in a fully active ministry, finding the restrictions of the diaconate a limitation upon their actions, whilst ‘seekers’ progress through a process of discovery and enlightenment, content to spend a year discovering one aspect of ordained ministry before progressing to another. Similarly, those with a predominantly functional view of ministry may be frustrated by having some crucial aspects of leadership, such as presiding at Holy Communion, withheld from them until they are made priests, whilst the more sacramentally-focused might be content to be changed one step at a time.

In order to be made a deacon, candidates are formally ordained by their bishop, often in the cathedral of their diocese. Legal formalities are undergone,[405] they are introduced to the congregation who are asked if it is their joint wish that these people should be ordained, hands are laid on their heads by the bishop and the power of the Holy Spirit is invoked. It is a complexly structured ceremonial and public occasion as well as a sacramental act, it is the first time that the candidates will be seen in a clerical collar, and it is designed to mark a solemn, though joyful, moment of change. It might be expected that ordination would be a hugely significant rite of passage, and that ordinands would be apprehensive about conducting themselves appropriately in such a visible setting, but at interview, this did not seem to be the case. They were given a retreat immediately before the ordination in which to prepare themselves for the step they were about to take, and in which they could bring any last minute

[405] Candidates have to swear allegiance to the Crown and to their Bishop (in all things legal and honest) and to make assent to the Thirty-nine Articles. They will repeat this process each time they take up a new clerical post.

concerns to God and their retreat conductor, but up to that point, other priorities had filled their thoughts. Residential students find themselves having to move house, unpack boxes and often concurrently settle families into schools and new jobs, which can divert the energies that might otherwise go towards careful consideration of what is about to happen at ordination. Martha, who was single and had spent three years in training, described the rush with which students on shorter courses seemed to be 'skidding into ordination,' and was relieved that she had been given rather longer to come to terms with leaving residential training and the prospect of moving somewhere else. Self-supporting ordinands, in contrast, did not expect their lives to change significantly, were not moving house, and looked upon ordination itself with equanimity. Deborah, returning to be curate in her husband's parish, said that ordination 'felt kind of reasonably normal…part of a continuous movement rather than having felt like a very big change.'

There was a sense that although ordination as deacon was functionally important as it marked the beginning of a practical ministry, it would be ordination to priesthood a year later that marked the fulfilment of the calling. James admitted that he hadn't been sure 'how much difference' being ordained deacon would make, and was surprised to find that *becoming* ordained – in the sense of being able to be a visible clergy person in his parish – was 'an absolutely amazing experience, much more than I thought it would be.' Eleanor was carefully instructed by a retired lay-woman in how to administer Communion

using the reserved sacrament,[406] but found herself frustrated by the clash between the lay assistant's insistence that all must be reserved for that 'special' moment when Eleanor would be able to preside as a priest ('I thought, she's talking about losing your virginity here, not about celebrating Communion!') and her knowledge that she was actually called not to the diaconate, but to priesthood: 'I thought, no, I'm ordained, I'm going to be a priest one day, and I'll stand in front of the altar.' Rebecca was blunt about her dislike of being forced to spend a year carrying out tasks that she believed could well be filled by others: 'I don't know why I'm a deacon, I'm not called to be a deacon,' whilst Naomi, who was already not happy in her curacy, said that although it was 'incredibly hard,' it was a privilege to be given a year in which she was able 'to wrestle with what it means to be who I am.' She also, however, hoped that her vocation would make more sense to her when she was ordained priest. The moment of deaconing itself did not seem to have made much impact. It would perhaps take on more significance when looking back from a more established ministry, but for those very newly ordained, the practicalities of learning to live and work in a parish seemed to be more important priorities. Once more, context and practice – undertaking the journey rather than thinking about it - had a greater impact than theoretical abstractions.

Only two respondents to this study spoke warmly about their ordination to the diaconate. Nick, who throughout his training had placed great emphasis on reflective practice, spent a considerable period of time before his ordination

[406] Bread and wine previously consecrated by a priest. Deacons cannot consecrate.

thinking about what it would mean to him and for his future ministry. Those 'few seconds of ordination' were, he said, absolutely crucial:

> I'd been thinking about it in terms of rites of passage theory. I was about to pass a threshold, and having prepared myself, I felt very surrounded by people all there. Then I was kneeling, we all knelt in a semi-circle and the bishop came to us, and I suddenly realised that it was all about me, me and God, and I nearly stood up and said 'I can't do this.' I was quite surprised to find myself saying that, and I realised I had to jump across the threshold [because] something [was] about to completely shift in my life.

Nick's ontological and sacramental understanding of ordination, where he believed that his entire character would be changed by that one moment, gave him confidence that despite some initial difficulties with the parish and his incumbent, it was 'hugely right' for him to be ordained to serve in that place: 'this is who I'm meant to be.' Deborah, planning to be part-time curate to her husband, had expected ordination as a deacon to be 'a kind of formality,' but found herself feeling almost 'drunk' with the Holy Spirit: 'I'm not expecting to feel like that all the time, but…that was very special.' Despite her low-key assumptions about what her ministry would involve ('not doing huge amounts because I'm still working full time'), her time on pre-ordination retreat had emphasised the 'enormity' of what she was about to do, and her experience of

ontological change gave her confidence and affirmation: 'I felt, yes, this is where I should be, this is what God wants me to do.'

Although some students might have found aspects of their training experience to be unsatisfactory, with grumbles about staff or fellow students, they mostly recognised that had been in an environment where there was a sense of a common purpose, where faith lay at the heart of all that they did, and where there was an expectation that kindness, forgiveness and understanding would underpin personal interactions. They had been members of a community which was supposed to be sympathetic and encouraging, which had allowed them to make mistakes and to learn from them. Naomi, for example, although feeling let down by the times during her first year at a residential college when staff or students had not been as 'supportive' of her needs as she would have wished, still said that the friends she made, and the opportunity to 'stretch [her] theological mind with other people and talk about the issues that are important' had been the most important aspect of her training. Yet upon ordination, all this is left behind and opportunities for peer-group sharing of experiences and informal 'debriefing' are few and far between. The excitement of finally being ordained and licensed to begin ministry is tempered by the concern that the world outside will be a very different place. In sociological terms, ordinands are moving from community into society; from a place of focused mutual understanding to a location which privileges diverse and diffuse individuality.[407]

[407] Kirkpatrick believes that the ethical function of communities is to serve the needs of society. Kirkpatrick, 2001 p.36

Each new deacon has to begin to discover what their ministry means, and how it makes sense, in terms not only of their own understanding, but in a very specific place and context.[408] To allow this, and to protect them from what can be self-induced or externally imposed overwhelming demands, they need to discover what they are able to do, and how to place appropriate limits on their ministry. They need appropriate boundary markers.

The first year

Visibility

Margaret Harris believes that ministers of religion, in the face of a multiplicity of expectations from their institution, their fellow clergy, their colleagues, those they serve and the wider community, find it difficult to effectively prioritise their work. They know at heart that they will be unable to meet every demand placed upon them. To add to this dilemma, she adds, is the fact that with 'unclear and multiple goals,' they are forced to interpret their role based on a combination of personal preference and 'norms derived from their training.' What is more, the decisions that they make about how to authentically respond to their calling are likely to be more complex and esoteric than what the majority of laypeople ask of them: security, a sense of community and professional services.[409] There is a fundamental divide between what they think they should do, what they know

[408] Billings points out that the 'priesthood of the few' only makes sense in the context of the whole Church. Billings, 2010 p.40
[409] Harris, 1998 pp.34-35

they are able to achieve, and what people actually want them to be and to provide. During their first year as ordained clergy, each of the former ordinands in this study had to work out what it is that was distinctive about their role, how they could combine the representative nature of their position with their personal preferences and skills in the tasks of ministry, and how to accept their own limitations and fallibility. As Gordon Kuhrt has pointed out, over only one generation, the costs of providing ministry have moved from the Church Commissioners to each Parochial Church Council;[410] clergy as a result, instead of maintaining a sense of some independence, can feel like simple service providers who have to please the parishioners who effectively pay their stipends. Although many of the costs of providing a curate are covered from central funds, parishes have to provide housing and pay other associated expenses, and it can be easy for a culture of anxiety to build up in the newly-ordained about the value they offer. The overwhelming majority of new deacons want to do as good a job as they can – Lydia admitted to being both 'excited' and 'scared' about the responsibilities of ordination – and so they are vulnerable to being pushed into unhealthy patterns of work or practice in order to meet the perceived demands of those they serve.

One of their first tests is to cope with increased visibility. Most stipendiary curates are placed in accommodation that is church-owned or is rented on their behalf. Although at least one diocese is now beginning to offer newly-ordained curates the option of accepting a house, the value of which forms part of the

[410] Kuhrt, 2001 p.17

stipend, or of receiving a housing allowance and providing their own accommodation, this is still the exception.[411] There are however tax implications and questions as to whether individuals can be compelled to buy a house within the parish, especially in high cost areas. Some curates are placed in rented accommodation outside the parish, necessitating commuting to a central place of work such as a church office.[412] If they live in a house in their parish, particularly if this is a house that has long been associated with clergy (such as a surplus vicarage),[413] then it is impossible to close the door on the outside world or to remain anonymous when at home. Clergy with family can find the behaviour of their spouse and children held up to scrutiny, whilst single clergy can find living alone in a large house a source of anxiety. Rebecca reflected that 'they don't tell you at college that it can be quite an isolating job, because you don't see anyone…you go and visit somebody, but it's not the same as having a chat.'

Ordained women had some particular concerns about becoming a public figure in their parish. Martha described an incident where a visitor to her vicarage made 'a very inappropriate [sexual] suggestion' which made her aware that

[411] As the cost of retirement accommodation continues to preoccupy clergy, this could become a more common model.
[412] There are pros and cons to this model; they are unlikely to find callers on the doorstep, but it can be difficult to feel part of the community they serve, and to become widely known within the parish.
[413] Whilst in the past, most churches would have had their own incumbent living in a vicarage within the parish, the joining together of several parishes into benefices means that there are often vicarages which are no longer needed to house the incumbent. Some are sold off, but in other cases they are retained to either house curates (if the benefice is regularly seen as a training location) or to be let out to secular tenants and provide an income.

'there could be a little more training [in college] about safety.'[414] She was well-supported by her training incumbent, and so found ways of formulating strategies to avoid such a situation in the future, but was left shaken and upset. Although government statistics show that young men are the most vulnerable group in society to suffer incidents of random or directed violence,[415] male ordinands and curates did not tend to think about the possibility of physical attack, and did not report cases of unwelcome emotional or sexual attachment from their parishioners. It's possible that such female to male attachment would be more likely to be directed at the incumbent rather than the curate, whilst women are socialised to recognise vulnerability caused by lesser physical strength and sexual stereotyping,[416] or that the men in this study felt uncomfortable admitting this type of vulnerability to a female researcher. The fact remains, though, that for some women, becoming a public figure was not only psychologically challenging, but also potentially dangerous.

Single women in this study expressed concerns that they might find it difficult to marry and have children (single men, who also talked about loneliness and the

[414] She emphasised that her training incumbent had been a great source of support after the incident, but that although physical safety had been briefly covered during training, the psychological consequences of coming to terms with a traumatic incident – 'how do you then go into your next visit?' – had not.

[415] [415] *Crime in England and Wales 2006/07* p.11 at http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110220105210/http:/rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/crimeew0707.html accessed 25 August 2011

[416] There are of course occasions when ordained men, particularly if they are older and single, can feel vulnerable to assumptions that they might be a paedophile. Physical safety – and links with the clerical abuse of children - can depend on the location of ministry; the Provost of St Mary's Cathedral in Glasgow has written about the fact that 'aggressive comments' about his clerical collar have frequently caused him to remove it 'before walking home.'
See Kelvin Holdsworth, 'Called or collared' in *What's in Kelvin's Head* http://www.thurible.net/20080627/called-or-collared, accessed 25 August 2010.

hope to find a suitable partner, did not assume that their vocation would be a barrier to future relationships). Judith, who had earlier talked about her thoughts about marriage and potential issues that could arise given her conservative views on headship and gender roles ('I think a lot of that applies to the marriage situation'), said that it was difficult to make friendships in the local area, which was 'isolating…the psychological stress has been considerable.' She also talked about the inappropriate and intrusive interest of some male parishioners, including one clearly ill person – 'my stalker' - who made threats against her that were investigated by the police. 'The insecurities come out, the disappointments in life,' she said. Lydia, newly-married to a priest, had talked before ordination about public reactions when they were out together, especially if they were holding hands: 'ooh, it's a vicar and he's not gay!' The acceptance of public scrutiny was becoming part of the calling.

The housing in which curates lived could create its own issues and challenges. Having already experienced difficulties in accepting his title parish because he believed the house provided by the Church to be unsuitable, Nick found that there were still problems in the alternatively offered privately rented accommodation. The central heating broke down, smoke detectors behaved unpredictably, and the adjustment to 'living in somebody else's space' was harder than he had expected. His wife was able to find work locally, which he saw as both an advantage ('it's allowing her to get into the community'), and a limitation, as she would not always be able to attend church events. One of his

children also managed to find employment in the local area and others were in education, so in many ways Nick felt that they were ‘making the transition’ to being a clergy family, although they would all have to ‘work out what it means to live in a place that is basically home and a working place.’ James was startled by the demands of living in a city environment and the damaged nature of some people who arrived on the doorstep and in church: ‘I’ve called 999 more times in the last year than I have in the rest of my life altogether.’ His wife found it hard to balance the demands of being a public figure whilst not quite fitting in to the parish structure (‘you belong but you don’t belong’) and James himself wondered how it would be possible for her to find her own role without falling into the stereotype of the cucumber sandwich-making clergy wife. ‘On occasion she complains that I behave towards her as to the curate of a parish,’ he admitted.

Judith, a single woman, found the attention of her parishioners could become overwhelming. She talked about ‘silly phone calls’ about trivial matters such as the choice of biscuits at church functions (she believed her training incumbent’s ‘kind and gentle’ nature encouraged this), about parish expectations that because she could cook, she would help to cater for most functions, and that offers to help look after her garden or do other practical tasks in the vicarage were usually pretexts for accessing the house and ‘pushing boundaries.’ Judith had worried about her privacy before ordination, having assimilated a model of ministry, demonstrated by her father and family friends, that was based largely

on self-sacrifice, and confessed that she sometimes hoped to leave the parish and 'have a possibility of living normally.' The visibility associated with her role and with living in a parish-owned house reinforced her earlier fears about ministry, and she found it almost impossible to find a balanced response to the unpredictable nature of parish duties. Eleanor, in contrast, found that although she had made a pragmatic decision to accept an urban parish rather than the rural setting she found more congenial, used skills honed in her earlier working life to find ways of coping with frustrations. She knew that there were times when the resources she had developed in her previous career were useful to the parish, but also that she needed 'space' to set aside the past and concentrate on learning to be a member of the clergy. She recognised when frustrations about the house she was living in threatened to spill over and affect her work ('the stress of this place affected my performance as a human being, let alone as a vicar,') and developed a pattern of work and leisure that sustained her energies and enthusiasm: 'I keep a chunk of the day from twelve o'clock to about three for me and the dogs…partly because the dogs need it and partly because it's sanity space.' Recognition of her own needs and a healthy disregard for what she considered to be the often unrealistic expectations of others led Eleanor to deal robustly with the problems and demands of parish ministry.

Each new deacon had to make decisions about appropriate dress whilst on duty. While at one level a trivial matter, the way in which they presented themselves

could cause some anxiety or need complex negotiation. Once more, there were basic differences based on church practice and theology; evangelical clergy often saw wearing a clerical collar as potentially divisive, forming a barrier between themselves and their parishioners, whilst catholic clergy tended to understand the collar as a symbol of their changed status in ontological as well as functional terms, and an important way of being recognisable in the community. Before ordination, Lydia had worried about the negative images associated with women in clerical dress: 'people's sexual fantasies about priests, about a woman wearing a dog collar, nuns and stuff.' She had always intended to wear a clerical collar whilst working; her pre-ordination placements in hospital chaplaincy, especially amongst geriatric patients, had proved the value of being easily identifiable as a member of the clergy. James, who had been brought up as a Roman Catholic, retained some reservations about 'the power thing that's projected by a clerical collar with a black suit,' but always wore a clerical collar whenever on duty. Nick, who came from a family of clergy, explained that his working agreement required him to normally wear a clerical collar 'whilst on business in the benefice,' but that whilst he would wear sober black tonsure-collared shirts, he intended to 'carry on wearing bright colours' in the form of other items of dress. For Nick, the clerical collar was quite simply a 'uniform' which enabled people to 'assume that they can talk to me.' Six weeks into his curacy, he described how putting on a clerical collar also allowed it to be taken off to mark the end of the working day. 'I was having supper this evening and the children said, 'aren't you going to take your collar off?' I'd forgotten I

was wearing it.' (It should be noted that some of the participants in this study had previously belonged to uniformed organisations, and so had a relaxed attitude to the imposition of clerical dress. One of them put it this way: 'I spent ten years wearing a bloody uniform; I don't need to know about assimilating roles.') Like other uniforms, wearing clerical clothing allowed curates to give a visible sign to others that they were at work, and also by taking off the collar, to symbolise to themselves and their families that they had moved into personal time. The collar itself became a boundary marker. 'I know when I take my collar off, I can relax,' said Naomi.

Evangelical clergy often had different expectations. Richard came from a background where ministers 'did wear dog collars,' and had planned to wear clerical attire himself, but found himself confused about the conflicting messages he received from clergy in charge of Evangelical churches. A visiting minister talked to him about the need to become known in the community when building up a local church (which Richard believed could be easily communicated through dress), but insisted that he would not wear a clerical collar, preferring to be on the same level as his parishioners. Judith had planned before ordination to wear a collar only where the 'context' made this appropriate: in church, in hospitals and sometimes when out in the community, 'but I wouldn't if I went to Sainsbury's.' A year later, in her parish, she explained that wearing a collar drew a clear demarcation between time when she was on duty or considered her time to be her own: 'I tend to wear them Mondays, Tuesdays, not

Thursdays, because I'm studying, not Fridays because it's my day off, very often on a Saturday, but not always…if I feel I've worked enough hours that week I don't wear a collar.' Although she found it a useful badge of identity for activities such as home visits, she was aware of the difference in practice between herself and her training incumbent. 'I don't always wear it because I feel if I do, and the vicar doesn't, something will be made of it.' Most of the Evangelical ordinands in this study had expected during training that although wearing a clerical collar would not be something that they would do on all occasions, it would at times be a useful signifier of their role. However, once in parishes and working with more experienced clergy who often had strong feelings that formal clerical attire could form a barrier between themselves and their congregations, the way in which they dressed became both a political statement and a potential source of conflict with their incumbent. Instead of being a boundary marker that helped them identify whether or not they were on publicly visible duty,[417] it became something that could put up barriers between them and the clergy with whom they were expected to work and learn.

The early weeks of ministry were often spent trying to balance the desire to learn as much as possible with the need to utilise individual gifts and interests. Nick confessed that although he felt 'comfortable with most things,' he felt completely unprepared in school settings: 'I'm really doing it based on native wit and a bit of feedback.' Reflecting on this, he realised that there had been

[417] This is not to suggest that clergy are not prepared to respond to need outside what they consider to be working hours, but rather that they are signalling to themselves and their family the difference between public and private time.

opportunities to develop experience in working with children whilst at college, but that he chose to do other modules instead. The unrecognised expectations he had held about his future ministry had shaped the way he had made decisions about priorities whilst training. James admitted that it was 'slightly overwhelming' to be faced with so many new experiences, 'but there's a real sense of being here to do something in this place.' Others were more critical of the training they had received. Andrea felt that her training at a residential college had focused on academic theology and 'wasn't practical enough.' She struggled particularly with preaching, and with feelings of insecurity about her theoretical skills: 'I didn't want to be an academic, I wanted to have real experience.' Her image of ministry had been shaped by feelings of exclusion from more traditional expressions of church – 'quite a lot of the stuff went over my head' – until she had met a young priest who combined easy accessibility with bringing up a young family. 'That's how I wanted to be,' she said. The fact that Andrea had dismissed many of the examples of priesthood she had come into contact with, both in her own experience of churchgoing and during training, fixing instead on the one person she met whom she thought was similar to herself, meant that in the future she had few resources to fall back upon when her experiences failed to meet her expectations. The models each person had held to during discernment and training had affected the way in which they had prepared for the ministries they hoped to have.

Building relationships

Interaction with the training incumbent was often thrown into very clear focus in the early weeks in ministry. New curates were keen to build good working relationships and usually wanted to impress their incumbent, but held varying views of how firmly they should be 'managed' and trained in the ways of the parish. They also wanted to retain a sense of individuality; they had been called to ministry *because* of who they were, rather than in order to be shaped into a particular form of priesthood. John Turner has pointed out that parishioners meet 'an image' of their pastor rather than getting to know the 'true reality' of the individual;[418] alongside the natural concerns about the demands of the job, competence in role and adequacy of the faith which underpins it, may lie a deeper fear: will I lose sense of who I am, as I respond to the expectations placed upon me? William Whyte has suggested that for some people, priesthood becomes an identity which is put on to stifle the individual beneath; 'performance' replaces authenticity, and the 'role' of the priest disguises the person who is playing the part.[419] Although Whyte is referring specifically to homosexuality in the priesthood, the concern that ordination will suppress individuality was common amongst the ordinands in this project. Martha's training incumbent encouraged her that feeling 'comfortable being an ordained person' was a crucial objective during her first year in the parish; Simon hoped that being a priest would 'feel like a natural fulfilment of the kind of person I already am;' and Rebecca insisted that priesthood had to be not about being

[418] John Turner, 'The Cost of Denial' in Galloway, 1997 p.97
[419] William Whyte, 'Performance, Priesthood and Homosexuality' in Garnett *et al*, 2007 p.88

perfect, but ‘about being me, so that other people can see not me, but God.’ James, in contrast, seemed to accept that what would be projected upon him was to a large extent out of his hands, but that priesthood *required* the individual to be recognised as different:

> Priesthood is quite deliberately being set aside, trained, put into a role that makes you different. The nature of the difference is…to do with God, whether it’s a closeness to God, or a focus on God, or being a representative of God; all those things can be different elements of it.

Such a theology enabled him to see any change in his identity as a positive sign of the ontological and functional aspects of ordained ministry.

Some deacons easily settled into effective working relationships with their new training incumbents, even though they might quickly have discovered them not to be the paragons that they had earlier hoped for. A significant number found it a much more complex process than they had envisaged. Nick was determined to respect the experience and position of his incumbent – ‘I’m immensely grateful that the Bishop has placed he and I together,’ – but found that the age gap between them (Nick was older) and their very different backgrounds made it necessary for him to ‘keep reminding myself that I’m not his tutor.’ James found that there was ‘tension’ between his family and that of his training incumbent, particularly between the two clergy wives (‘that takes quite a lot of prayer, and

quite a lot of time to think through,') and Judith, who had placed much store on the 'headship' of a male incumbent, found him 'soft in his approach' and reluctant to face difficult issues in the parish. Even those women married to serving priests admitted that there were some adjustments to make: 'I'm having to kind of nudge [my husband],' said one, 'to just sort of say, remember I'm here, and I can do things.' These frustrations could be considered quite normal in individuals keen to fully engage with the ministries for which they have been ordained whilst remaining under the supervision and scrutiny of another priest, perhaps both uncertain of what the role of the training incumbent should be. The world into which some training incumbents had been ordained might have been a very different one to that in which new curates shape their ministries,[420] they would have travelled along different routes towards priesthood and expectations of the role of incumbent and curate have altered significantly with the ordination of older candidates and women. However, any differences of practice or opinion could, if there had been particularly high hopes of the incumbent/curate relationship, feel as if they threatened both current and future success in ministry. Three elements seemed crucial to the development of a mutually respectful and encouraging relationship: genuine affection (Lydia for example said simply that she *liked* her incumbent); a recognition that the parish is ultimately the incumbent's responsibility, not the curate's (Eleanor put it this way: 'it's his congregation, I'm only here for five minutes'); and the ability for

[420] Mark Chapman's history of Cuddesdon Theological College points out that the liberalising tendencies of principal Robert Runcie, who took over leadership of the college in 1960, included 'eventually allowing women (including wives) into the College building as occasional guests.' The pace of modernisation in the Church of England can be exceedingly slow, and expectations formed early in a career often persist despite external change. Chapman, 2004 p.169

both parties to engender and sustain a sense of trust which depends upon the ability to learn from each other's successes and mistakes ('when things go wrong we seem to be able to deal with them and laugh about them later') instead of resorting to blame or recriminations.

Dealing with difficulties

Some relationships were difficult from the start. Rebecca had earlier described how she had decided to accept a parish that did not feel instinctively congenial because she believed that her training incumbent would be someone with whom she could have a positive relationship and who could offer her support and good teaching. 'I'm hoping for a continuation of the model I've had on my placement,' she said, 'where support comes in the informed conversations you have.' There had been signs at college that relationships with authority figures were important to Rebecca; she had criticised the way in which her college principal had followed up some difficulties she had experienced during training, she had first considered that particular college to 'please' her DDO, and she recognised that she relied upon her bishop 'to have some eye for what my gifts are.' Only six months after ordination, the relationship with her incumbent had broken down to the extent that she was to be moved to another parish to complete her curacy. She blamed herself for being 'very idealistic' about the curacy, but also felt that she had to some extent been deceived by her bishop. The well-respected incumbent had, she now believed, more theoretical knowledge of parish ministry

than practical experience, and had been put into that parish by his ‘good friend’ the bishop in order to test out his ‘theories’ about ministry. It had been many years since he had been responsible for a curate, and Rebecca felt that she was not only not receiving the support she had hoped for, but was also having to soak up the anxieties of the congregation about changes that were afoot. ‘It’s not a nice feeling,’ she said.

Rebecca realised that the failure of the relationship was not totally one-sided; she knew that she could appear overly ‘impatient or blunt’ at times; but she was hurt by the way in which her incumbent gave her feedback (‘I get told off for an hour’) and angry that she was ‘entirely dependent’ on the reports which her incumbent would give to the bishop: ‘I hadn’t realised the power that goes into play in that.’ There were significant gender issues too. Rebecca described a deanery dominated by ‘old men’ where ‘all the rubbish jobs are done by women and all the management is done by men’ but where women were seen to be an overwhelming majority in the Church; an arrangement described by her incumbent as ‘really bad for men.’ As a mother of young children, she found the company of other ordained women in similar situations to be of enormous support, and was encouraged to find herself to be a role model for other young women considering ordination. Rebecca had not previously considered that gender issues could become a significant aspect of her ministry; like many other young women, she had grown up within a society which assumed that women and men would be treated equally, and had not been exposed during training to

any academic assessment of gender politics or feminist theology. She had no formal resources to draw upon.

Feminist commentators have criticised this trend in English ministerial preparation and experience; Yvonne Warren described her 'surprise' at 'the lack of a feminist theological forcefulness' within the ordained women she encountered in her study of stressed clergy, theorising that either they had never had the resources to develop a feminist theological viewpoint, or that they had been engaged in so many battles on their journeys to priesthood that 'they had no fight left.'[421] Lesley Orr Macdonald wrote similarly about a female member of the clergy who she found had been

> wounded by the inadequacy of her ministerial training, which did little to acknowledge or deal with the gender issues and power dynamics that affect male and female ministers in distinctive ways…she believes she had been treated carelessly by the church she was called to serve as an ordained minister.[422]

Without the theoretical tools to address issues that can feel intensely personal, women (and men) can find themselves bewildered by the complex entanglement of identity, gender, authority and expectation. They need the interrogative and interpretative frameworks that I have described as 'boundary markers.'

[421] Warren, 2002 p.38
[422] Lesley Orr Macdonald, 'A Spirituality for Justice: The Enemy of Apathy' in *Feminist Theology* 23, January 2000

Feminist theories[423] crucially address the relationship between the personal and the political; they are concerned above all with the dynamics of power, of the way in which identities are constituted and maintained, with the intersections between culture and understanding, and with recognising and addressing situations that lead to oppression and injustice. Although many secular feminist theorists have been critical of the role of institutional religion in creating and sustaining situations of inequality, feminist theologians have seen concern for the marginalised, the desire to seek justice for all people, and a deeper understanding of what it is to be fully human, as deeply God-related issues. Rosemary Radford Ruether suggests that an understanding of Jesus as someone whose 'life message and praxis were redemption from patriarchy'[424] would undercut those who identify Christian faith as hierarchical and oppressive, and Natalie Watson envisages the church as a 'body of those whose shared lives embody and proclaim the values of the reign of God.'[425] Although feminist theology can be of particular value in addressing issues based around gender and exclusion, other 'boundary markers' are also available. Psychology can help an understanding of influences upon the development of a personal identity (Jung, for example, recognises a distinction between 'persona' and 'personality' that is of particular relevance to those taking on representative professions such

[423] There is no single feminist viewpoint, as feminist valuing of otherness and difference encourages the definition of theory as dynamic and responsive, and understands the desire for one overarching theory to be reductive and oppressive.
[424] Ruether, 1998 p.277
[425] Watson, 2002 p.101

as the priesthood),[426] virtue ethics can investigate the formulation of moral principles,[427] and philosophy can consider how wrongs and suffering can flourish when our 'frameworks of conviction lead us to discount the significance of what we see and hear.'[428] It is impossible, of course, for ordinands to study all these disciplines in depth, but if theological training does not provide at least an introduction to the wealth of academic thought that can aid examination of complex or painful situations, then they are left disadvantaged and under-resourced.

Curates also needed to build relationships with people inside the parish, both regular churchgoers and those who might only visit the church in moments of extremis or at points of transition. The representative nature of ministry soon became clear; Martha talked about her dogs being an easy way into conversations as she walked around local streets ('people want to talk, and actually that's part of what we do') and Naomi enjoyed the way in which wearing a clerical collar enabled her to 'say hello to people, and smile at people, and make conversation; it opens doors.' Schools could be locations of joyful ministry, and where for historical reasons, particular issues or simple mistrust, clergy found it impossible to gain access to local schools – one curate complained that 'we can't get into the senior school because we represent the institution' – they were left frustrated by the denial of an opportunity to share

[426] Carl Jung, 'Anima and Animus' in Saguaro, 2000 p.164
[427] See for example Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, which suggests that modern concepts of morality are 'meagre substitutes' for the virtues upheld in classical and medieval periods. MacIntyre, 2007 p.243
[428] Wolterstorff, 2008 p.ix

understanding and build links within the community. Deanery chapters (meetings of local clergy) could be sources of help and advice, or appeared to be full of 'dinosaurs' that curates had to 'work around.' Effective relationships had to be developed with lay colleagues and Parochial Church Council members; Eleanor found it difficult to discover that her PCC had taken little account of employment legislation when looking for a new office worker, but realised that 'ordered leadership' had to be shared with lay officers, and Sarah recognised that it was imperative to be able to work 'collaboratively' with the PCC and Church Wardens.

Once more, there were obvious differences between stipendiary and self-supporting deacons; stipendiary clergy in new parishes had to learn as much about their church officers and local practice as they did about their training incumbent, whilst self-supporting clergy returning to familiar parishes had already developed good relationships with the laity. Most would have had to prove the support of their PCC before entering ministerial training, and often envisaged themselves in supporting roles rather than in positions of leadership. Deborah talked about becoming part of the parish 'pastoral team' and David, who would effectively be running his church plant, was sure that he would be able to combine leadership with co-operation: 'I'm not a megalomaniac.' Nicola, locally-trained but in a stipendiary curacy summed up the feelings of many by explaining that she had been taught to be collaborative and flexible in her ministry, whilst her training incumbent had been opened up to new possibilities

by watching her practice: ‘I think it’s partly the old training, where the vicar does everything (and he loves to do everything) so it’s a transition for him.’ It was not only the curates’ models of ‘ideal’ ministry that were being shaped by their experiences; often their training incumbents’ models of priesthood were being expanded too.

Conclusions

The first year of ordained ministry can be both a challenge and a joy. At last it is possible to exercise the vocation, and to begin to serve a parish in a particularly focused way. Yet alongside the exhilaration that may be felt at the completion of the initial phase of training, and at the moment of ordination itself, can run deep questioning about the purpose of the diaconal year, the value of the training that was offered to reach this point, and the way in which opportunities are limited by circumstance and location. Those with the highest hopes or the deepest fears are likely to react particularly strongly to difficulties and discomfort, and can make challenging situations even more complex. Much relies upon the way in which their training incumbents envisage the incumbent/curate relationship, the reaction of the church community to having a new curate, and the ability of all involved to retain a sense of grace and humour despite it all.

Pastoral counsellor Ronald Richardson believes that what he refers to as periods of ‘imbalance’ in church relationships or practice can make the clergy

the target of anger and frustration. This can feel intensely personal, and it is easy for church leaders, including curates, to believe that they are being attacked as individuals rather than as symbolic representatives of what is happening within the church. Richardson instead insists that such outbreaks are actually failures, or imbalances, in the 'system' – the way in which the whole community of the church operates – and that without addressing this imbalance, no amount of individual response will do otherwise than create more chaos.[429] It is worth remembering that for every curate who feels that their parish or incumbent does not like, support or understand them, there is also likely to be a parish or incumbent feeling the same way about their curate. (It can of course be difficult for a newly ordained deacon to make much impact on patterns set or encouraged by the incumbent, which can lead to increased frustration as strategies are seen, but are unable to be implemented. To send a curate knowingly into a parish where there is already conflict or the potential for difficulty, is to risk not only damaging the curate's sense of ministerial identity, but also inflaming the situation.) The theological imperatives to love one another, and to be aware of the variety of roles within the Body of Christ, can easily be lost in the self-inflicted pressure to be perfect for God. The curacy in general, and the diaconal year in particular, is a time to learn, to explore and to develop; the Church sends its ministers out into the world with the basic skills they need, but expects that these will be honed and shaped within the parish context. In order for this to happen, they need space and encouragement to grow.

[429] Richardson, 1996 p.30

Although many ordinands expressed some frustration by being required to complete a year as a deacon when they believed themselves to be called as priests, the limitations that this places on their ministry can help to protect them from having to deal with too many duties as soon as they enter their parishes. They cannot preside at Holy Communion, and although they are legally allowed to take weddings, the fact that they are unable to pronounce God's blessing on the couple means that most of them will confine their pastoral duties to funerals and baptisms during the diaconal year. They might not be asked to preach too frequently (often sharing this on a rota with their incumbent and any other authorised ministers in the parish) and there should be time to observe how experienced priests conduct worship, teach and offer pastoral care. It should be recognised that the type of parish can make a big difference; whilst deacons in city or town parishes routinely work alongside their incumbents each Sunday, those curates sent to multi-parish rural benefices can find themselves sent out to lead services of Communion by Extension[430] in several different churches each Sunday, often also being responsible for preaching and leading intercessions, without the opportunity to observe the usual practice of their training incumbent, or to be offered feedback from the incumbent on their performance. In such circumstances it is difficult for them to gauge how effectively they are carrying out their duties or to be guided towards more effective approaches. Simply getting through the Sunday routine becomes their mantra, rather than learning how to do things well.

[430] Services using pre-consecrated bread and wine

The euphoria of being ordained and at last able to start work in the parish often carried people through the first weeks of ministry, when everything was new and strange. Deacons who had experience of challenging secular careers or who had learned that mistakes were at times inevitable (Sarah said that her college placement in a hospice taught her 'to be at ease with my inadequacy'), seemed to be more resilient and able to learn from the situations in which they found themselves. Both those who had hoped that with God's participation, all would *always* be well, and those who were ambivalent about their vocation, struggled with any setbacks or problematic relationships. In many cases, real difficulties would not manifest themselves until subsequent years in the curacy, but in a small number of cases, the curate/incumbent relationship was showing signs of strain from the very beginning. The fact that one curacy in this study broke down irretrievably within six months – partly because of what the curate involved confessed had been a 'very idealistic' vision of what working with a particular incumbent would involve – demonstrates the importance of fostering realistic expectations from curate, incumbent and diocese, and of being as directive as possible about what the curacy should involve. Several curates reported that they felt they had to 'take on a lot of the incumbent's problems in the parish;' a situation which caused resentment (on both sides) and stress. Others referred to 'pastoral landmines from experiences years ago' in their parishes, sometimes feeling that neither the diocese nor their training incumbent had been completely honest about the history of ministry in that place. If informed decisions had been

made, they felt prepared to deal with the consequences of, for example, a vicar in conflict with his congregation over reordering the church building, or a previous curate who had 'had an absolutely dreadful time.' If such situations were only revealed once they were in post, they felt deceived and disappointed.

It has already been noted that many ordinands have over-idealised visions of what parish ministry will involve, and that the selection and training process does not seem to significantly modify these models of 'ideal lives.' It does seem that lived experience, in the form of placements or in the curacy, has the ability to reshape expectations and practice in a way that theoretical engagement does not,[431] but that too great a divergence between the hope of what might be, and the experience that is, can fatally undermine the future of ministry in that place. Investigation of the subsequent years of the curacy will reveal just how damaging such 'ruptures' (to use the anthropological term) prove to be. What is clear, however, is that many of the newly-ordained lack the critical skills to examine their situations reflexively, and to apply academic concepts to what feel to be very personal limitations upon their ministries. Fonow and Cook suggest that the 'outsider within[432]' can clearly see discrepancies between the stories told by insiders (such as incumbents or long-standing parishioners) and the situations with which the 'outsider' (in this case, the curate) becomes involved. If their clarity of vision is valued and encouraged, then creative responses and associated growth can follow; if they are silenced or ignored, tension, anger and

[431] Davies and Guest note the importance of 'embodied experience of diaconal ministry.' Davies and Guest, 2007 p.42
[432] Fonow and Cook, 1991 p.3

frustration can result. Without the theoretical skills, the 'boundary markers' to examine difficult situations, curates can look inwards to their personal failings and inadequacies, without considering that other factors might be more relevant to the particular situation. Feminist theory and theology would form one such boundary marker, but others could also be relevant to individuals in specific contexts. What is vital is that they have the tools to consider what is happening and why, and to find means of 'strategic transgression' that allow the boundaries to be overcome without destroying the situations they mark.[433] Whether this becomes possible for the respondents in this study will be examined in the next chapter, which investigates the impact of being ordained priest.

[433] Walton, 2007 p.24.

Chapter 7

Consolidation

Introduction

Although ordination as deacon allows curates to begin parish ministry, all the newly-ordained clergy in this study had set out on a journey to priesthood rather than the diaconate. Many initially felt frustrated that the Church insisted on ordaining them first as deacons, making them wait for a further year before they could be ordained priest, and looked forward to being able to exercise the fullness of their vocation. They believed that the diaconate was not well understood by their parishioners, causing confusion about their status and their capabilities, and found conflict between their eagerness to offer Christian leadership and the fact that they were firmly under the control and direction of a more experienced priest, their training incumbent. It was difficult for them to understand why they were forced to spend a year in a transitory[434] order of ministry to which they had not been called and in which neither they nor those they served saw real value. It seemed as if they had been forced to divert from their original route plan, making an unscheduled stop at a point that they had not wished to investigate.

[434] Although the diaconate is a historic and important calling in its own right, there can be a sense for those called to priesthood (and their parishioners) that the diaconal year is merely a probationary period.

From the beginning of their journeys towards parish ministry, high hopes had been invested in the moment in which they became priests. Sacramentally, it would allow the performance of those duties reserved only to the priesthood – consecration of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, absolving sins in the name of Christ, and bestowing God's blessing upon individuals and congregations – and practically, it would mark the transition to being a 'real' member of the clergy. Some might hope for eventual consecration to the episcopate, thereby embodying the threefold ministry of the Church (deacon, priest, bishop), although it would be unwise openly to admit to such ambition, but for the majority, priesthood was their hope and was expected to be their fulfilment. The situations and circumstances in which that priesthood would be practised in the future could not yet be envisaged, and were subject to the guidance of God and the needs of the Church, but the general trajectory of what was expected to be the remainder of each person's working life was now set. Whether in parish, Cathedral, hospital or school; in secular employment or stipendiary ministry; wherever each was called to serve would be the holy ground upon which they must, in the words of the *Book of Common Prayer*, always 'be Messengers, Watchmen, and Stewards of the Lord.'[435] Some might find themselves unable through circumstance or inclination unable or unwilling to exercise their priesthood, but they would always *be* priests, their essential character changed forever. Nick summed up the hopes of many in this study when he exclaimed: 'I still want to be a priest on my deathbed…I haven't made this change in my life not to believe that this is a privilege.'

[435] *Book of Common Prayer,* p.539

Although the process of 'growing into' priesthood would never come to an end (ordained clergy are encouraged to continue the study of theology, be aware of changing patterns of worship and liturgy, and keep up-to-date with societal preoccupations and concerns, as well as continually learning from, and being shaped by, the experience of interacting with their parishioners and congregations),[436] the initial, formal stages of discernment, selection, tuition and validation – expressed most visibly through public ordination – had been completed and a lifetime of priesthood lay ahead. This fact itself caused some irritation; potential clergy are selected to be leaders as well as interpreters of the sacred, and the desire to operate that leadership, to try out new approaches in the parish and to fully utilise individual skills and gifts often clashed with the need to defer to the training incumbent, to always support the incumbent's initiatives in the parish regardless of personal feelings, and to be considered by the diocese 'curates in training' who were expected to continue to attend training days and courses in 'initial ministerial education.' The excitement that accompanied the move into parish ministry, and the survival of those first, confusing weeks as an ordained representative of the Church, had worn off, and the prospect of spending at least two more years as a curate lay ahead. To *become* a priest had been a long-held dream, but the process of translating hopes into often mundane reality was often more complex than individuals had

[436] Davies and Guest suggest that the practice of religion can 'shape identity over time.' Davies and Guest, 2007 p.4

previously acknowledged. They had arrived somewhere, but it was by no means the end of their travelling.

In the preceding chapters, the transition through different stages of vocational awareness, selection and training has been traced and set alongside the various 'waypoints' offered by existing literature about priesthood in the Church of England: ideal lives, personal stories, investigative texts and boundary markers. The landscape has been mapped out, and the navigational aids available to ordinands and the newly-ordained have been examined. Some individuals have held a steady course, traversing smooth ground, whilst others have suffered delays and diversions, or found unexpected obstacles in their paths. Many had unrealistic expectations about the journeys they would take, and some clung onto the desire to follow in the footsteps of the 'ideal lives' of other clergy they had encountered, but all hoped to travel with God as their companion and guide. They had set out in hope on a journey into the unknown, and although there was still a long road ahead, they had, at priesting, at least reached a significant location on their travels. How they negotiated the twists and turns of the years ahead would to some extent depend on where they found themselves – Susan Wood has reminded us that priestly identity is contextualised, dependent upon the 'historical, particular, pluralistic and contingent' circumstances of ministry[437] - but also relied upon the acquisition of sufficient practical and personal skills to continue moving forward even in the face of difficulties and disappointment, and the assimilation of these into their internal, imagined landscapes. Ordination as

[437] Susan K Wood, 'Presbyteral Identity within Parish Identity' in Wood, 2003 p.176

priest marks the moment at which each minister has to consolidate the experiences and learning that have led to this point into a coherent and sustainable pattern for living wisely and well.

Facing realities

Taking stock

Although most of the respondents in this study had been impatient to become priests and widen their experiences of ordained ministry, many found the value of the diaconal year became clearer when viewed in retrospect. This may be true of most aspects of ordained ministry: Michael Sadgrove has stated that vocations have to be 'lived forward and understood backwards,'[438] but seems to be particularly relevant to that first year as a member of the clergy. Eleanor for example, although frustrated by many of her incumbent's attitudes to leadership and ministry, admitted that 'staying on the periphery is a good place to be' in that it offered the chance to observe and understand the politics within the parish before becoming directly involved with shaping practice. Martha had been unusual in expressing contentment with the opportunity to spend a year 'on the edge of what's going on, and on the edge of church, and proclaiming the gospel and actually just [exploring] the service level of it,' recognising that time to experience the diaconal vocation was 'incredibly important.' Even she, however, was unsettled to discover that the expectations of her parishioners had been

[438] Sadgrove, 2008 p.2

shaped by secular practice in careers such as teaching, where a probationary year as a newly qualified teacher has been the norm before taking up the first 'proper' post. 'There were some people,' she said, 'the week after I was priested, who asked when I was moving. It was almost as if I'd done my trial year, and it must be time to move on and go and be a vicar somewhere.' She was able to reassure them that her curacy would extend beyond that first year and to maintain her enthusiasm, but someone less sure of their place in a parish (like Naomi, who felt that her gifts were not 'valued' because they didn't 'fit with traditional parish ministry') could have been further discouraged by the easy assumption that the diaconate was merely a functionally transitional stage to priestly ministry. Groenhout and Bower have pointed out that within the Church, the opportunity to learn from practical experience (especially for women) is often suborned to the prioritisation of doctrine.[439] The necessity for theological institutions and employing dioceses to encourage the belief that the diaconal year is embedded ministry in its own right, and that it is a period of immense value and importance, cannot be overstated.

Becoming a priest of course opens up a raft of new responsibilities and opportunities, but the transition from the diaconate to the priesthood was, for many, not as great as they had expected. The ordination itself felt less of a milestone, perhaps because unlike being ordained deacon, it did not mark the beginning of a completely new way of life, and because the lack of understanding of the diaconate amongst many parishioners meant that they

[439] Groenhout and Bower, 2003 p.3

were unlikely to notice, or comment upon, significant differences. This is particularly interesting as in many larger dioceses, priestings take place in parish churches rather than the cathedral, emphasising the links that have been forged with local communities, and assuming that parishioners will make up a significant and enthusiastic part of the congregation. The experience of respondents to this study implies instead that parishioners are likely to be present from a sense of loyalty to 'their' curate – demonstrating a duty of support and encouragement – rather than from any sense of theological or sacramental engagement. Deborah admitted that her ordination as deacon had felt more 'affirming' than her priesting, because it was then that she had recognised for the first time 'a real sense of the Holy Spirit's anointing' and had been given 'a new start.' For Eleanor, a sudden sense of unworthiness caused her pre-ordination retreat to be a time of 'huge soul searching,' but she was the exception; the majority of respondents had seen the transition from being a member of the laity to being ordained as a deacon to be the time when those concerns about grace and humility were addressed. By their transition from deacon to priest, they had generally accepted that their vocation was daily being affirmed by successful ministerial practice, and most made no comment at all about the ordination service at which they were made priests.

For all the earlier anticipation of proceeding to the priesthood, the constant routine of parish life and ministry tended to be of more significance than the moment of priestly ordination; James, despite having a strongly sacramental

theology, had anticipated this during his diaconal year, when he had wondered 'how much difference it would make.' Even the joy of being able at last to celebrate Holy Communion, which had seemed such a landmark during training, could become another event to fit into increasingly busy diaries ('more early mornings,' said Judith), and for some people, the implicit message received from their training incumbents was that they were now priests and should get on with the job without expecting to receive further training or support. If there were difficulties in the relationship between curate and incumbent, they were likely to be magnified over time, and if there were significant reservations about the vocation, these often became more intense rather than being resolved by the practice of ministry. (There is a clear difference between individuals who had expressed a due humility about their worthiness to serve as clergy, where the experience of becoming a curate gave them confidence that perhaps God really was in the process, and those who were reluctant to enter parish ministry at all, who found the whole experience increasingly miserable and unfulfilling.) Rebecca, whose relationship with her training incumbent broke down to the extent that she was moved to another parish before being ordained priest described the end of her diaconal year as 'awful,' and Nick, who went to a second curacy in order to regain some confidence about his ministry felt that he had not learned 'how to fit the lot together in a sustainable way.' Being made a priest does not offer easy solutions to intractable problems.

For some new priests, particular circumstances led to real changes in their position in the parish. Sarah, who had not experienced a straightforward journey through selection and training, found that priesting meant the very rapid assumption of new responsibilities. She knew that her curacy was not going to be easy, the parish having been 'brought back from the brink' of closure by her training incumbent, but she had not expected to be left in charge of a parish suddenly in interregnum:

> I was priested one day, presided [at Holy Communion] the next day, and the next evening [my incumbent] had me round for supper and said, 'I'm going to give the Archdeacon a call,' and I didn't really see him much from then.

Realising that there was much she still had to learn about the day-to-day running of a parish, and of the detail of complex pastoral situations or duties (such as weddings) that she had not encountered during her diaconal year, Sarah found local clergy whom she trusted to offer her support and advice: 'I needed to be able to ask people the difficult questions.' She was able to envisage the interregnum not only as a time when she would learn much about the practical expression of her vocation as a priest, but also as a positive time for the parish, when the 'autocratic' leadership of the past could be set aside in favour of encouraging a model where 'the vicar enables the church to be the church.' Not everything was straightforward – much of the conflict within the parish that had

formerly been directed at the incumbent now headed towards her – but a combination of realistic identification of historical factors and adequate support meant that Sarah was able to flourish and grow in confidence. She said that she was 'growing into and loving being a priest,' and was beginning to consider her next move. 'I've been on quite a fast schedule,' she mused, 'and that's probably been good for me.'

Other individuals also found that circumstances lead them to take on duties beyond the normal lot of a newly-priested curate. Nicola's incumbent took a sabbatical, leaving her in charge of the parish for three months; a period that left her not only confident in her ability to maintain a busy parish, but 'energised' by the experience. Reflecting on the curacy as she prepared to take up her first post of responsibility, Nicola realised that it had been necessary for her incumbent to learn to delegate to the curate, as well as for her to increasingly take charge of aspects of parish life. 'He loves to do everything, so it was a transition for him.' She believed that he had been 'really generous, really open, really supportive' and that the curacy had enabled her to do 'so much more than I ever imagined.' A successful and happy curacy left her ready to move on to a new post, secure in her identity as a priest and ready to face new challenges.

James, who was struggling with relationships within the clergy team, and who believed that he was not always getting the support he needed because he projected 'the image of always being OK and always being in control,' was given

the opportunity during his diaconal year to test his abilities and his vocation in trying circumstances. There had been widespread flooding throughout England after an unprecedented period of heavy rainfall, and James' parish had been particularly badly affected. For two weeks, drinking water had to be supplied in bottles, power supplies were intermittent at best, and there were no flushing lavatories. It was 'quite extraordinary,' said James, and it happened whilst his incumbent was away on holiday. Although the civil and military authorities took charge of practical matters, James found himself responsible for 'praying and visiting people to see if they were OK.' It was, he recognised, a 'formational' experience, as he began to work out what the Church was for and how pastoral issues could lead to a 'spiritual response.' This was particularly important to James, as he had, up to that point, been bewildered by the gap he perceived between practical ministerial skills and the more nebulous concept of ontological priesthood: what it meant at a deeper level to be ordained. 'I don't want [my training incumbent] to tell me about the Eucharist, or how to do things,' he had said, 'but I do want him to tell me how to be a priest.' A combination of circumstance, competence and faith allowed him to use a testing situation to transform and consolidate his personal concept of what it was to be an ordained minister. When a year later his incumbent took a sabbatical, James felt confident that he could adequately look after the parish even though he recognised that much of the time he was 'trying to project competency' rather than having adequate experience in all aspects of priestly ministry.

Training and practice

Some participants in this study found that they were struggling to be given any responsibility at all. Deborah, although feeling 'very blessed' to be allowed by her bishop to continue serving her title post as curate to her husband, felt that becoming a priest 'was not a great change' and that the reality of priesthood had been very much what she expected. She had been surprised to find her first Eucharist as celebrant to be both 'scary and exhilarating,' but as a full-time employee in a secular institution, continued the pattern set during her diaconate of only little involvement with church during the week, and what she had described during training as 'a sort of Sunday helping out with services kind of role.' It is likely that being placed elsewhere as a curate could have led to more overtly demanding training from her incumbent – the desire to maintain domestic harmony can outweigh other factors – but Deborah found satisfaction in combining her roles as an ordained minister at work and in the parish whilst maintaining her previous calling as a clergy wife. She believed that she had been largely accepted by others as a priest. However, when it came to thinking about post-curacy options, Deborah was less certain. She was due to retire from paid employment in the near future, but felt that although she would like 'a parish ministry of my own apart from [my husband],' this seemed to be both 'scary and unworkable.' Despite being a highly experienced professional holding a senior secular post, the lack of confidence she demonstrated in her role as a priest seemed to be directly linked to the belief that her selection,

training and curacy had all been pointed towards supporting her husband's ministry. Without being given the opportunities to prove that she was capable of functioning independently, she could only imagine continuing similar patterns of ministry in the future.

Other curates found that poor relationships with their training incumbents affected their ability to learn about and exercise priesthood. Judith saw her incumbent as having 'poor boundaries, so he runs around like a headless chicken,' and therefore tended to ignore any guidance he offered on practical matters (it's telling that she felt that she 'had everything [in the parish] under control' when he took a long holiday). When discussing what she had learned through formal teaching at theological college and subsequently in the parish, she referred to the 'life experience' gained in previous employment as being most significant, as it had enabled her to exercise leadership, develop a 'thick skin' and learn how to manage situations. She believed that her incumbent was 'quite afraid of projection from the congregation,' and despite admitting that she had been taught that a curate should above all things have 'a willing spirit,' felt that managing his demands and working practices was vital to her survival in the parish:

> I've found I've got to set boundaries with the vicar as well [as with parishioners]…He phoned me up about something, 'oh, could I read this email in the church', and I said, 'no, I can't read it tonight, it's now 9

> o'clock, Friday's my day off, so next time I go in to read my email will be Saturday morning, I'm afraid I can't read it until then.'

Judith was continually torn between her recognition that she should not undermine the authority of her incumbent and her belief that the Church of England and its clergy were 'terribly amateurish.' She reflected that her professional experience before ordination allowed her to see the 'traps' inherent in large organisations and their management of change, and that people entering ministry without such experience would find it difficult to function effectively. Her largest frustration was the 'lack of clarity about the role of the ordained person,' which caused difficulties for clergy and parishioners alike. 'They haven't got a clue about the Church, not a clue,' she said. 'They have no idea what I do.'

Other curates with significant secular experience expressed similar problems in recognising that parish life might not quite measure up to professional practice. Nicola had enjoyed her curacy and 'loved' being a parish priest, but struggled with the fact that whilst in previous employment she had worked in a team situation with close supervision and feedback, she now found herself in a very different environment:

> I think when you're watched and not affirmed or encouraged, that can feel quite hard…the people in the parish can be great, but if you've got other

> members of the clergy there, it would be quite nice if there was more affirmation or constructive criticism as well.

She recognised that she was fortunate in serving a curacy in a single church, which at least meant that her training incumbent and she were able to observe each other's practice ('other people don't get much chance to be watched because they're having to do stuff on their own'), but felt frustrated that at the point of considering her next move, she was having to ask for some 'real appraisal.' Her training incumbent had always been open about the fact that he was 'not an encourager,' and was considering doing some training on working within, and developing, teams, but tended to assume that Nicola's competence and contentment meant that everything was therefore satisfactory. She had taken the initiative in reminding him that she would need both a formal annual report on the progress of her curacy and references to support her applications for her first incumbency. 'I think you need to know,' she told him, 'how things are for me.'

James had also had a secular career in which he had held high levels of responsibility and accountability, and had developed skills in managing people, money and projects that he believed were helpful in ministry. He was startled by the disconnect between professional environments and the way in which parish life was influenced by individual volunteers, but had already been able to use his previous practice to address difficult situations in the parish. Recalling how a

building project at church had not been progressing, despite all the necessary elements such as funding and permissions apparently being in place, James described how his secular experience enabled him to 'just sit quietly in the background' working out where the sticking points were: 'I found out that it was because the vicar's wife didn't want it to happen, so I found a way of breaking it down into little pieces that she would be happy with.' He was critical of the wider inability of the Church to accept the skills of those new to the profession, believing that curates in training were treated as 'pond life' despite their previous life experience, and infuriated by a deanery chapter meeting to address a particular project where there were 'lots of good ideas but no idea how they were going to do it.' James knew that he was a curate and still had a lot to learn, but he could see too many examples of more experienced clergy dismissing his particular skills – skills that he wanted to be able to use on behalf of the mission of the Church - purely because 'as an assistant curate in training in a parish, you know nothing.'

James had from the beginning of his curacy experienced some difficulties in his relationship with his training incumbent. He cast a critical eye on the way in which he was being guided through his curacy:

> My incumbent has quite a long history of delivering training before ordination, and delivers training in the diocese. He stands up in front of a group of people presenting Powerpoint, [but] one-on-one he's not a

particularly good trainer because I suspect he's not been trained to be a trainer in that sort of way.

Like Nicola, James believed that because he was able to function fairly competently within the parish (typified by taking charge whilst his incumbent was on sabbatical), his need for formal, structured training and feedback went largely unrecognised. 'I think I've been trained by the parish rather than trained by the incumbent, trained by what's going on,' he said. 'I feel I've got a long way to go in terms of holiness and rootedness and all that kind of stuff.' Nick, in his second year of curacy and also from a high-achieving secular background, expressed similar frustrations. He too had problems in his relationship with his training incumbent, and believed that the Church in terms of responsible practice was 'light years behind other professions.' He talked about the need for professional counsellors to have regular supervision sessions whilst priests were often expected to cope with the consequences of complex pastoral situations alone,[440] of his perception that training incumbents needed to be 'properly trained' and put through a better induction process by their dioceses before they take on curates, and of the fact that it can be difficult for curates to be open about their concerns: 'as a curate, you're saying, 'wait a minute, Boss. I hear what you're doing, and fair enough – well, not fair enough – but this is not going to work for me. I'm learning the wrong lessons.'

[440] One person in this study did receive regular professional supervision, but she had come from a caring profession, and had 'made sure' that she asked for paid support from her Diocese.

For other curates, accepting the realities of the situation within their parishes was an easier issue. Eleanor found the weaknesses she observed in her training incumbent (particularly his 'avoidance of issues' within the parish) were only minor irritants that were outweighed by the fact that she both liked and respected him as a colleague and a priest. She found that her confidence in directly addressing issues, a factor both of her personality and her experiences in her previous career, helped her to feel that her skills were being used to good effect, and her incumbent's lack of interference with her daily timetable allowed her to organise her duties to suit her energies and sustain her enthusiasm. Instead of trying to alter her incumbent's approaches to relationships within the parish, she determined to support him whilst enabling his parishioners to function adequately in the future. 'It's not my job to change the church,' she insisted, '[but] I do think that it's my job to try and at least make sure that the congregation is competent to deal with the things that [my training incumbent] won't deal with.' Support from a more experienced colleague enabled her to see that her different ministerial style did not have to be viewed as a difficulty, but could be a valuable resource:

> He said to me, 'you're behaving like a bull in a china shop,' and I thought, 'oh, here we go.' And then he said, 'the good news is, you're not a bull, you're right to be angry; and the bad news is, these people aren't china, stop treating them as if they're going to break.' And I just started to soar then, like a balloon.

A situation that could have become problematic was, through mutual respect and the freedom for each member of clergy to operate in the way that maintained their own understanding of priesthood, able to be a positive experience for all.

Analyst Margaret Harris has written about the difficulties often experienced in relationships between ministers and lay people, where questions about authority, motivation, religious ideals and role expectations can lead to overstretch or a 'sense of failure engendered by official, but inherently unachievable, religiously based purposes.'[441] What becomes apparent in conversations with able, well-motivated curates, is that those with significant experience in other fields, including voluntary work and motherhood as well as professional careers, believe that God's calling of them was, at least in part, a calling to use in the service of the Church the skills that they already possessed. Sociology has confirmed the importance of being able to utilise insight, reflexivity and experience in order to flourish within communities; Patricia Collins, for example, has written about 'outsiders within'[442] and their need to 'learn to trust their own personal and cultural biographies as significant sources of knowledge.'[443] If this ability is inhibited either by their own diffidence (Martha,

[441] Harris, 1998 pp.174-175
[442] Curates, who now belong to a community of ordained ministers but who do not fully 'belong' because of their status as recently-commissioned trainees, form excellent examples of the 'outsider within.'
[443] Patricia Hill Collins, 'Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought' in Fonow and Cook, 1991 p.53

for example, said that she didn't 'want to spread my wings too far too soon') or by a lack of trust within the parish (which can often relate to the leadership style of the training incumbent), then relationships and confidence can suffer. Gender issues and styles of church practice were less important than beliefs that transformation was possible (Sarah Coakley has written about the importance of 'patient practices of vulnerability')[444], that God was present, and that learning and development would take place. Both curates and their training incumbents need to feel well-supported and well-prepared for their respective roles, and confident enough to utilise their particular skills and gifts without feeling the need to conform to the pattern of another's ministry. They need opportunities to consolidate their previous experiences, to read the terrain, and to proceed in the best way possible to reach their next destination.

Disappointment and disaster

Assessing realities

'In broad terms,' writes Alan Billing, 'the task of the clergy is to support the mission of the Church in making God possible.'[445] The clergy in this study had been motivated by the desire to journey into priesthood, living out a calling that was expressed through the Church and which they hoped would lead them and others closer to God. They had been trained and ordained, had found training

[444] Sarah Coakley, 'Fresh Paths in Systematic Theology' in Shortt, 2005 p.77
[445] Billings, 2010 p.49

posts in parish settings, and had increased in confidence and competence during the first years of their curacy. Practical skills had been largely mastered ('I feel ministerially I'm collecting the Green Shield stamps,' said one recently priested curate) and issues of identity, such as visibility within communities and the role of ministers' families, were being addressed. What was still problematic for the majority was the much bigger question of what it is to be a priest, ontologically, functionally and personally, and what that priesthood would mean in the contexts and situations to which they were called.[446] 'I can stand up and intercess at the drop of a hat, no problem,' said a female curate. 'I can walk into a church and say, 'OK, what are we doing? Fine, we'll do it.' That aspect of it is fine. It's working out who I am as a priest that's considerably harder.'

Working out who one is as a priest might always have been a complex task – even Rowan Williams' study of historically significant Anglican clergy and theologians admits that 'there is little here that is utterly and uniquely Anglican'[447] – but it seems to be particularly difficult in an increasingly fragmented and contextualised Church, serving a vocally sceptical society. Nicola Slee's poem, *Presiding Like a Woman*, identifies the gap between certainty and unknowing in which the wider priestly[448] identity can flourish:

[446] Davies and Guest have identified the 'importance of place as a context-shaping narrative.' Davies and Guest, 2007 p.167
[447] Williams, 2004 p.7
[448] By this I mean the priesthood of the people of God, rather than the ordained ministry.

> This is how we do it:
> not really thinking how we do it but doing it;
> not naming it for what it is but sometimes, in flashes,
> recognising the nature of what it is we do[449]

but for the newly ordained, struggling to adapt to the particular needs, idiosyncracies and demands of their parishes and training incumbents, 'flashes' of recognition are often not enough. Their concepts of priesthood might have changed from their early days in training – Rebecca, for example, moved from identifying priesthood as being about representing 'the bigness of God' to admitting that she now felt that it was now 'less about me than it was and much more about God…getting out of the way quite a lot and letting it flow' – but if they were struggling in their parishes, continuing uncertainty about their identity as a priest could threaten to undermine their confidence, their practice and their vocation. Naomi, who had always felt called to priestly ministry expressed outside the parish setting, and who had found her curacy both difficult and painful, said that her situation was made more difficult by confusion about what priesthood could mean for her: 'another thing that feeds into this struggle that I'm going through is who I am as a priest, and what God is calling me to.' Judith, also challenged by the unwelcome call to priesthood expressed similar concerns:

[449] Nicola Slee, 'Presiding Like a Woman' in Slee and Burns, 2010 p.8

> There's great confusion about what I should be doing for the Church, which is not an easy state of affairs…clear expectations [from the diocese] would be helpful…if there are ordinands who are not very clear about what ordination is for, what the essentials of the Gospel are, if they're not sure about what they're meant to be doing, they will be sailing adrift.

Her concern for the wider Church and for those entering training was genuine, but it was also a concern for herself and her own identity and practice as a priest. Without 'clarity' about her role, she too was in danger of sailing adrift.

For some priests, assessing the realities of their position in the parish meant less about their personal identity, and more about recognising what was possible. Martyn Percy's investigation of those 'implicit' factors that both affect and shape church life and practice suggests that what is not made explicit or visible can be deeply significant; expectations, context, history and performance are all factors that help to sustain 'a faith that is embedded in a community of praxis that makes beliefs work, and gives shape and meaning to lives that believe.'[450] For all the clergy in this study, their diaconal year had been a time not only when skills had been learned and practiced, but also when the implicit theology of the parish had been encountered and was beginning to be assimilated. Their hopes and plans for ministry had to be shaped by the needs and factors they encountered in their particular context, and by having the

[450] Percy, 2010 p.4

confidence to let God direct their actions. Nicola described how increasing familiarity with the formal tasks of ministry had made her 'freer to engage with the sense of what I'm doing,' and that it had been exciting to 'find out what God's vision is for a place,' and Nick talked about trying to observe the parish through his peripheral vision 'because I suspect that's where God is, not where I'm looking.' This is something well known to ethnographers, who understand that only embedded familiarity with place, situation and community will help to explain what might appear straightforward but can easily be misunderstood. Engelke and Tomlinson, for example, refer to the 'contested, partial ways in which meanings can emerge in interaction,'[451] Spickard writes about 'webs of significance'[452] and Fenella Cannell describes the necessity to set aside 'the assumption that we know in advance what Christian experience, practice, or belief might be.'[453] In navigational terms, it's not enough to study the map; it's also necessary to walk the ground and discover the surroundings.

James, confident in his vocation but struggling to cope with its impact on his family and the challenging relationship he had with his incumbent, talked about his insight that ministry, parish and home were intimately interrelated. He had found that the expectations placed on him whilst in different roles (priest, husband, father, curate) had become 'blurred,' and that if pressures became unbalanced, all aspects of his life were affected. 'If things are awry at home,

[451] Engelke and Tomlinson, 2006 p.6
[452] James V Spickard, 'Ethnography/Religion: Explorations in Field and Classroom' in Clarke, 2011 p.990
[453] Cannell, 2007 p.4

which occasionally they are,' he said, 'that flows out into the rest of ministry.' The reverse was also true; his children had a 'healthy cynicism' about the Church, having seen the negative effects of Christian service on James and his wife, although they were 'still very comfortable with God.' Sarah had at times wondered if her vocation had been the cause of some uncomfortable issues within her family, but found that the varied experiences she had had in different ministry settings, including pastoring bereaved parents, had enabled her to 'be present without the answers,' and to trust that God cared for her own children even if they were currently quite distant from the Church. She was able to admit that the way she now expressed her faith had been shaped by the contexts in which she had worked and the personal difficulties she had experienced; she described how the previous years had 'blunted some of my hard Evangelical edges about who's in and who's out' so that she worried less about the practice of faith and trusted instead 'in God reconciling the whole of creation to himself.' She was explicit that an understanding based upon personal circumstances 'does feed back into ministry,' noting that she was now much less insistent that families seeking baptism were able to articulate a mature and informed faith, instead recognising that they were searching for an appropriate spiritual response and reacting 'positively to what is there.' She also talked about a weekend spent at a secular arts festival, which had shown her that Christians don't 'have the monopoly on joy and freedom.' Priesthood, for both James and Sarah, was no longer something that they *did*, but something that they *were*. All aspects of their lives fed into their priestly ministry, and their knowledge of

themselves as priests was shaping the way in which they led their lives. In terms of process theology, they were being transformed through and with and in God as the world is being transformed through and with and in God.[454] The boundaries between role and identity were being swept away.

Breakdown and disaster

For a small number of people in this study, the process of becoming a priest was not the positive experience for which they had hoped. Instead of building the foundations of a lifetime's ministry, they found themselves bewildered, unhappy, in conflict with their training incumbent or significant figures within the parish, and wondering if they had misheard their calling. Some longed to move on quickly from their curacy into their first incumbencies, others were moved to second curacies after the irretrievable breakdown of relationships with their training incumbents, and some considered leaving parish ministry altogether. Having set out with high expectations on a journey that although challenging seemed to have a clearly planned route, they were forced to divert from their path, seek guidance, or admit that they were lost. After the years of preparation and effort that had led to this point, such perceived 'failure' was a devastating blow.

[454] 'The becoming of God and the becoming or transformation of the world are part of the same dynamism…God is seen as *with* the world, not over against the world.' Grey, 1993 p.35

Nick, although taking many years to accept his vocation to priestly ministry, had believed that ordination was the beginning of a process of becoming more 'Christ-like.' He accepted that this was the duty of all Christians, but that priests were 'called to make that journey in a very particular way.' Expecting that his experience of senior management in a secular career would be called upon in service of the Church, he had taken a course in leadership whilst at theological college 'recognising that that's probably something I will be called to.' He believed that he understood the Church, and although experiencing some difficulties in his initial relationship with his training incumbent, said that he was 'really committed' to supporting him and his work in the parish. 'It feels safe [being a deacon] because I feel I'm being called into being who I can be, more of who I am,' he mused, 'and that feels Godly.' His path was mapped out.

Only two years later, Nick was meeting his bishop to discuss the 'intractable' problems that existed between him and his training incumbent. Formal mediation sessions had not helped, trust between incumbent and curate had 'plummeted away,' and the parish was beginning to suffer. Despite the fact that the curacy had less than a year to run, Nick's bishop decided that he needed to be moved to a new place where he could have a fresh experience of parish ministry. Various studies on ethics and theology have stressed how crucial it is to have good interpersonal relationships within teams and groups, Kirkpatrick for example believing that community cannot be built without 'trust, love,

compassion and justice,'[455] and Blohm describing the belief of clergy that their ministries and working practices are based upon 'enabling and empowering' rather than on hierarchical power.[456] Yet the curate/incumbent relationship is more complex than secular practices or traditional theological hierarchies would suggest. Curates are under the supervision of training incumbents, who hold ultimate responsibility for the parish, but are themselves charged to act as leaders and offer prophetic witness, through their lives and ministry, to the presence of God. At ordination, curates are set apart for service, and are believed to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. They are selected by the Church because of their perceived abilities as well as the faithfulness they demonstrate to their vocation, and they have been put through a course of professional training that equips them to function responsibly and capably within parish settings. When relationships are based upon mutual accountability, shared responsibility and respect for each other's vocation and ability, then both curate and incumbent can work together in a supportive and encouraging manner. If trust and respect are lacking, then relationships inevitably suffer. (James' recognition that his experiences in the parish were coloured by his incumbent's unhappy memories of the former curate demonstrated the crucial nature of interpersonal relationships and specific histories. 'Every once in a while the boundary gets blurred and he forgets that I'm not my predecessor,' he mused, 'so it can get slightly problematic.') Curates who no longer believe that their incumbents are acting in a way which benefits the parish and the Church,

[455] Kirkpatrick, 2001 p.7
[456] Blohm, 2005 p.431

and who believe that they have a better approach, can find themselves in outright conflict with their incumbent and questioning whether their primary duty is to the church hierarchy or to God.

The curates in this study did not believe that their training incumbents were perfect (even if they had entered their curacies hoping that this might be so), but most found that they managed to balance any human failings and areas of weakness that they discovered against the opportunities for learning and personal development offered within the parish. When relationships were good, then the curacy flourished. Martha, for example, described how she had known that her incumbent had long experience of supervising curates and how he had given her the careful support and increasing levels of responsibility for which she had hoped. Despite a complex and busy parish ('it's got a bit of a history of not being wonderful with its clergy') she felt confident and happy in her vocation, and was able to accept with equanimity the prospect of her incumbent seeking another post. Simon had felt that the expectation of a good relationship with his training incumbent was 'the key thing' in accepting his title post, enabling him to move confidently to an unfamiliar diocese and a 'tricky' benefice. He described their working together as 'very good and mutually supportive,' and his experience of his curacy as positive and enjoyable. Even curates with training incumbents whose working styles and practices were very different to their own, could cope with occasional frustrations if they felt valued and useful. Nicola found that her incumbent, schooled in the expectation that 'the vicar does

everything,' had difficulties delegating and 'moving things on,' but knew that he had been 'really generous, really open, really supportive' of her ministry in the parish. 'We've had a really good relationship,' she said.

However, when any sense of mutual respect evaporated, as it did between Nick and his incumbent, both parties suffered. Nick believed that his training incumbent was working too hard, demonstrating unsustainable approaches to ministry and, under intense if self-inflicted pressure, was treating his work colleagues very badly. In response, Nick decided not to 'cave in,' even though he knew that his lack of deference to his incumbent was making the situation worse. In part, this appeared to be due to a simple clash of personalities – both men were of broadly similar ages and had similar family backgrounds – but Nick's employment history in his secular career was also significant. Having experienced severe stress in an unhappy period of his former working life, Nick was determined not to make the same mistakes again: 'I've had the experience of trying to work my way out of the bag, and it can't be done.' He was a few years older than his incumbent, and ambitious to learn quickly how to be an effective priest: 'I'm not going to spend 10-15 years in curacies, I need a fast solution.' He also pointed to the example of relatives who he believed had ruined their health in overwork for the Church, models that he was adamant that he would not be following. Nick soon found himself angry and disappointed, his incumbent took time off with stress, and their bishop was forced to intervene. With only a year of his curacy remaining, Nick was moved to another parish so

that he could have, as his bishop put it, a ‘different experience of parochial ministry.’

Although Nick and his family had been greatly upset by the situation (‘I don’t think I’d expected to be pushed into a place of such pain and darkness by a fellow priest’), their move was not as difficult as it could have been. They were to go to what appeared to be a congenial parish, which felt to them like ‘a sort of promotion,’ Nick’s wife had quickly and easily found another job that suited her skills, and the entire family were looking forward to leaving behind the ‘poisonous atmosphere’ that had impacted on their home life as well as affecting the working environment. The greater concern was for the parish and for the training incumbent. Nick acknowledged that his incumbent had received little support from the deanery or diocese, and believed that he had not been adequately prepared to look after a curate. ‘He doesn’t know much about training,’ he said; ‘I do.’ The true depth of unhappiness experienced by both men was largely hidden from the parish; the incumbent took annual leave in order to avoid spending more than a week on sick leave, Nick’s move was announced to be the bishop’s decision as the result of a request for assistance from another parish, and even the ministry team and lay officers of the church were not told the real story. As a consequence, there was no discussion about had happened (although parishioners were likely to have recognised at least some of the dysfunctionality in the curate/incumbent relationship) and no learning or healing of relationships was able to take place. The parish had a

history of training curates, and offered a good location to learn about parish ministry, but without attention to the reasons for the breakdown of this curacy, unhealthy patterns were likely to be repeated in the future. Nick had survived the experience and would learn from it, although he now wondered if his future really lay in parish ministry, but his incumbent was likely to carry deeper and lasting scars of failure.

Whilst Nick had looked forward to his curacy and his ordination as a priest, Naomi had always struggled with her vocation. Her diaconal year was marked by uncertainty and unhappiness, caused not by her situation or relationships within the parish – she described her training incumbent as 'excellent' and her parishioners as 'warm and welcoming' - but by the fact that she had never accepted that she was called to parish ministry. She had previously spent time living in a religious community, and hoped that in the future she would be able to live out a largely contemplative vocation, working alongside congregations and individuals to develop spirituality, reflection and 'the interface between the Church and culture.' At theological college, which she had found 'disappointing,' she had said that she already felt like a priest, as priesthood was 'about a way of being,' and that the only reason she hadn't 'walked away' from ministerial training was because of her deep conviction that God had called her to be a priest. The fact that the Church would only ordain her if she served a title post in a parish was a source of deep frustration and bewilderment,[457] and because she

[457] Although there would now be the opportunity to be ordained as a 'pioneer minister' and to work in more creative situations, that option did not exist when Naomi began ordination training.

was forced to serve in a parish, a setting which did not match with her internal vision of how her gifts could be used on God's behalf, what Mary McClintock Fulkerson has termed 'the grace of the place'[458] could not be recognised.

Throughout her diaconal year, Naomi's 'incredibly supportive' incumbent tried to give her opportunities to settle into the parish and to more fully inhabit ordained ministry. She was able to talk to him about her reservations, and about her firm understanding that she needed to take at least a day each month as a quiet day ('I can't do parish life and not do that'), that she must have a regular day off each week, and that she needed longer to prepare for duties than he, as an experienced priest, might require. All these requests were accepted, her incumbent being keen to make her curacy as encouraging and enabling as possible. Although the two were very different in their styles and approaches, the incumbent thriving on being busy and having plenty of human contact, and Naomi needing space, silence and reflection, their working relationship was good despite some reservations about each other's priorities. Naomi realised that her incumbent gave much more energy to visiting parishioners than she would be prepared to offer (she saw visiting as 'hard work' whilst he loved 'talking to people') but found his last-minute approach to planning and preparation difficult. He in turn tried to give her increasing responsibility in the areas she most enjoyed; planning liturgy and incorporating more spiritual elements into church life.

[458] McClintock Fulkerson, 2007 p.246

Despite all the good things about her curacy, Naomi remained deeply unsettled. She was regularly seeing a therapist, she was taking anti-depressants, and she was 'incredibly anxious' about 'doing things publicly.' At the heart of all this was her knowledge that she was not called to parish ministry; a knowledge that made her both stressed and guilty about the mismatch between her role and her identity. 'I don't feel that I can walk away at any time,' she said, 'because it's a vocation, it's not a job.' She believed that she had always been 'explicit' at her selection conference and with her DDO throughout training that she did not believe herself called to, or capable of coping with, parish ministry, yet that was what the Church demanded of her in order to follow God's calling: 'there was nowhere to explore what an alternative might be, or if there *was* an alternative in the Anglican tradition.' The pressures of living in this way were unbearable, and Naomi could only hope that God was asking her to 'hang on in there' until it was time to move out of the curacy into another form of ministry: chaplaincy, retreat leading, spiritual direction or life within a religious community. She knew that without a continuing awareness of God's presence, she would be contemplating suicide: 'if there wasn't some hope at the end of it, there would be no reason to keep going.' It was a desperate situation, and she was desperately unhappy. She had been let down badly by being allowed to proceed to ordination despite the Church's determination to make its ministers initially follow a common parish-based path regardless of their very individual gifts and callings.

For one priest responding to this research project, the disconnect between expectations of priesthood and the realities of parish ministry reached extreme levels. Andrea was in her first incumbency and although she had completed a happy curacy, had not enjoyed her training at a residential theological college, which she criticised as inflexible and unsupportive of her situation as a mother of young children. Insecure about her lack of higher-level qualifications, she was convinced that theological training needed to better integrate theory and practice, and hoped that her experience of working with children would be helpful in her future ministry. Nicola Slee has pointed out that for many women, attending church on a regular basis can be 'profoundly disempowering'[459] and Andrea affirmed this insight; she described how as a young woman much of the liturgy and teaching 'went over my head,' and how worship 'wasn't connected to me or my life.' Like many people in this study, she was inspired to discover a vocation to ministry by the example of one particular priest, who preached sermons that spoke to her experience and who combined ministry with having a family. 'That's how I wanted to be,' she said. The 'ideal lives' model of ministry was of enormous influence as she considered what her journey to priesthood would involve. It had not crossed her mind that her eventual destination might not be identical to that of the priest she so admired.

'In an incumbency,' writes Michael Sadgrove, 'there is nowhere to hide our inadequacies or find shelter at times of stress or distress.'[460] This, sadly,

[459] Slee, 2003 p.83
[460] Sadgrove, 2008 p.4

became Andrea's experience. Not all priests have degree-level qualifications (though this is becoming more common), but all ordinands are expected to demonstrate the ability to follow the course of study imposed by the Church. Jonathan, for example, described himself as having 'no appetite whatsoever for exams' and was happy to be offered the opportunity to train on a portfolio-based course, whilst academic high-flyers like Lydia, with post-graduate degrees, often combine ministerial training with advanced theological studies. Anglican priests have to be teachers and interpreters of faith and culture as well as displaying appropriate pastoral and practical skills; they carry the authority that goes with the assumption that they are members of a profession, adequately trained, assessed and qualified.[461] Andrea entered her incumbency unsure of her academic abilities, alienated from what she saw as elitist models of church practice, and hoping that 'real experience' would be sufficient to carry her through parish life. Almost immediately, conflict broke out. A member of her clergy team announced that he could not work with a woman priest, a PCC meeting 'got out of hand,' and a meeting between Andrea and her unhappy colleague resulted in his belief that he had been summarily dismissed. A complaint to the bishop swiftly followed.

Unhappy, uncertain and insecure, Andrea began to rely heavily upon one of her churchwardens for advice on how to run the parish – 'I used to go to him for absolutely everything important' - describing their relationship as 'very close.' Other parish relationships deteriorated even further: a parent at the church

[461] Harris, 1998 p.36

primary school was furious when her child was told off in the playground by Andrea, seeing her not as another parent but as ‘the vicar’; a parishioner complained to the bishop after her daughter was not enabled to marry in church (‘I didn’t know what special licences entailed,’ said Andrea); and a youth group trip to a Christian festival, supervised by Andrea, resulted in accusations of abuse. Andrea began to feel that she could trust no-one, and considered leaving the parish. She made no contact with locally based, more experienced clergy, finding her deanery chapter ‘unwelcoming,’ and although her bishop and archdeacon were aware of the more obvious problems in the parish, their well-meaning attempts to support both clergy and laity meant that the deeper issues of competence and capability were not being adequately addressed.

A short break away from the parish and the churchwarden’s absence on holiday made Andrea consider that it was time she began to ‘run things my way.’ Her churchwarden was bewildered by the sudden change in their working and personal relationships, and Andrea believed that he tried to ‘emotionally blackmail’ her. At the next PCC meeting, Andrea felt undermined and attacked, she responded inappropriately, and further damage was done to parish unity. Shortly afterwards, at one of the major church festivals, the situation came to a head. Andrea and some of her PCC members (including the churchwarden) had different ideas about liturgy and how the church should be decorated for the festival. Andrea and her husband set everything up in the way she wanted against the wishes of her PCC, but when she arrived to take the service, she

discovered that the church had been returned to its former state. The church was beginning to fill with worshippers and Andrea effectively suffered a breakdown. There was shouting in the vestry, a visiting minister had to take over the service, and when it came to sharing the Peace, she very publicly refused to shake hands with the churchwarden. 'I can't understand how he would want to do something like that; he knew that he'd upset me greatly,' she said.

Andrea's lack of understanding of the need to build good and appropriate working relationships within her parish can be traced back to her partial model of priesthood. She believed that parish ministry needed to be changed ('somebody's got to speak out') and admitted that she had expected to spend her time 'taking services and visiting, rather than doing all the administration.' Because she had based her calling on the 'ideal life' of a young priest she had observed only on Sundays, who had appeared to have no difficulties combining ordained ministry with having a young family, she had expected that the process of ordination would automatically allow that to happen, that her priesthood would give her a privileged and respected role within the community, and that her control over what happened in the parish would be absolute. Research in fact suggests that the opposite is true; that congregations are happiest and most content when they have a role in decision-making, and that in order for ministers to have a secure position, they paradoxically need to hand over some control to

their parishioners.[462] Andrea talked with frustration about the fact that churchwardens and other laity who took on roles in the church could not be held to account because they were volunteers: 'we put these people into positions of authority where they can do what they like, and that's got to change.' She did not trust her archdeacon and bishop, and was furious that by encouraging her to apologise in person and in writing to the people with whom she had been in conflict, they had been unsupportive of her role: 'what [they] have done has undermined my authority.'

Although at interview Andrea had hoped to return to work after a period of sick leave, and believed that she had to continue working in parish ministry ('I need to go back because I can't afford not to work'), she still felt that it was an 'impossible' job and that parishes needed to be more specific about what it was that they wished for from their clergy. 'I'll never trust anybody again,' she said, but it was clear that far from learning from her earlier difficulties, she had now switched allegiance to her other churchwarden, who she described as 'fantastic' and 'very supportive.' There was a danger that old patterns would be repeated, and that both Andrea and the parish would suffer as a result. Her situation was not unique; Dean Hoge has pointed out that research into ministry has repeatedly shown that if there is a disjunction between the roles that ministers hope to perform (in Andrea's case, leading services and having a pastoral role in the local community) and those that they are forced to carry out (predominantly duties of administration and organisation) then their morale and satisfaction

[462] Torry, 2005 p.68

suffers. He also identifies the conflict between the way in which ministry is defined as a 'total way of life' and the desire of many ministers to maintain a sense of themselves as individuals distinct from their role, and to defend time for themselves and their families,[463] a subject on which Andrea had been passionate. 'When I was ordained, we were told categorically that it was God first, then our family, then the church,' she said. But when her archdeacon pointed out that she would be viewed by parishioners, parents at the local school and villagers as 'a priest at all times and not [initially as] a parent,' Andrea saw that as threatening her position within her family, and challenging her understanding of her calling by God. The models of priesthood demanded by the Church, her congregation and those in authority over her simply did not fit with the expectations and hopes that she held.

Logging the route

Strategies and support

Feminist theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid has suggested that the greatest hope for salvation is the 'unstable' construction of 'the non-docile God and the non-docile people of God.'[464] Her work insists that it is only by resisting ideological and social constructions that are unjust, repressive and unethical that we are able to rediscover the true nature of God, and develop new ways of engaging

[463] Dean R Hoge, 'The Sociology of the Clergy' in Clarke, 2011 p.583
[464] Marcella Althaus-Reid, 'On Non-Docility and Indecent Theologians: A Response to the Panel for *Indecent Theology* in *Feminist Theology* vol. 11.2, January 2003 p.184

with God and one another, and her most well-known concept, that of 'indecent theology,' refers to a theology that is not bounded or regulated by 'parameters of decency/indecency.'[465] However, as the newly-ordained soon discovered, 'non-docile' parishioners can, if welcomed, be sources of enormous energy and creativity, or they can present apparently insurmountable problems. Finding strategies to deal with the stresses and questions raised by parish ministry – whether these relate to issues of authority, power, leadership, relationships, purpose or identity – and having adequate support systems in place to address any uncertainties and difficulties are crucial. Those formal structures that are supposed to provide just this sort of forum, particularly local gatherings of clergy in deanery chapters, were often dismissed by respondents to this research as irrelevant, unhelpful or divisive. One curate described her deanery chapter as 'the most depressing thing ever.' The curates in this study who were able to ask for and receive appropriate support and advice from people that they trusted, and who found ways of recovering a sense of identity and purpose amid the pressures of the parish, were those who continued to find their vocations a source of joy and satisfaction. Those who were not able to devise such strategies were struggling to survive.

Family and friends could be useful sounding blocks, offering a sympathetic ear and speaking out when they saw situations beginning to become unbalanced. Rebecca, for instance, had a husband who pointed out that in his professional life it would be unthinkable to put up with the aggressive and hostile style of line

[465] Althaus-Reid, 2004 p.7

management he saw to be operated by her training incumbent, and found enormous support in 'local networks' of other ordained women. Nick belonged to two cell groups that had formed during his time at theological college, and found that one group in particular was becoming a 'dispersed [religious] community' which was developing a rule of life which helped them to 'support each other's ministry in a much more proactive way that perhaps we've done so far.' He was forthright about his need for support: 'if I hadn't been surrounded by the most fantastic group of friends, I might well have been a complete wreck by now.' Lydia prayed with her husband, also a priest, and appreciated the fact that their differing theologies and gifts helped them to acknowledge that they had 'different solutions to the same problems.' Some people recognised that time taking care of their health and well-being was essential; they mentioned taking their dogs for a walk each day, running long distances, and pursuing hobbies like sailing. In contrast, the curates who were struggling most in their parishes often had no-one they could turn to for encouragement or no way of escaping from the day-to-day pressures of work. Andrea's inappropriately close relationships with churchwardens appeared to be a direct result of having no clergy colleagues or close friends to give her support, and a marriage that seemed to be under stress because of her unhappy parish life. Judith's discomfort with her vocation was not helped by turning only to her elderly parents who were 'straight-talking and stiff upper lip, [telling me] you've got to endure,' and Naomi, whose late husband had been ordained, did have friends in ministry who had been 'vital,' but often turned to her father-in-law, who had

himself been a priest, and who 'wanted to help me find a way through.' She seemed to view her vocation in part as carrying on her late husband's interrupted ministry, and his parents' enthusiasm for this placed further pressure upon her not to consider if parish ministry was indeed her true calling. 'Is God asking you to be miserable?' I asked her. 'No, God wants me to find a way forward, God wants me to be happy and whole, and that means that there are things I have to work through…it would be so much easier to give up, but because I know God is there, I can't.' If God is viewed as a demanding (if essentially benevolent) taskmaster, there can seem to be no way out.

Looking back at the journeys already travelled enabled interviewees to contemplate the twists and turns in their route, but also to realise how far they had already come. The process of taking part in this research project became itself a form of guided reflection ('it's been nice to share this in a way that I hope is safe and helpful,' said one participant), although it sometimes threw up the recognition that initial hopes about ministry had been over-idealistic and that the reality was unlikely to match the dream. Paul, at second interview confessed that it had been 'a bit of a shock' to read a transcript of our first meeting: 'I realised that I came here all bushy-tailed, with a spring in my step, and…you come face to face with who you really are, and it's not quite who you thought you would be.' What did become clear was that where there were issues that affected the success of curacies, they were related to elements that had always been present: concerns about competence and adequacy, lack of confidence,

vocations that did not match with opportunities, issues with obedience and trust, loneliness, struggles with team work or the supervision of volunteers, and adherence to unrealistic or unsuitable models of ordained ministry. Although one female priest blamed the breakdown of her curacy firmly on 'the age and gender difference between me any my incumbent,' in general, difficulties tended to revolve less around gender, age, theology or church practice, and more on simple clashes of personality. If training incumbents and curates were able to like and respect each other, then they were able to overcome most differences of opinion, practice and approach.

Being a priest

Throughout this project, two particular questions were asked in exactly the same way at each interview. One question examined the role of religious faith despite any difficulties by asking 'where is God in all this?' and the other assessed the trajectory of theological understanding by asking 'what is it to be a priest?' It was perhaps only to be expected that individuals in their first weeks in theological training might have fairly idealistic or imprecise models of priesthood and priestly ministry (although an important part of the selection process is the examination of a candidate's vision of what ordained ministry involves and how they believe that they will meet the needs of the Church), but surprising that so many men and women still held onto 'ideal' models of priesthood as they prepared to be ordained and to begin their curacies. The process of ministering

within a parish was, for most, a time when those models were most shaped and formed. It seems that understanding priesthood relies as much upon experience as upon theory, and that *being* a priest and living and working *as* a priest (although the exact expression of this will vary greatly because of context, understanding and situation) is a crucial stage in how curates learn to inhabit and accept the priestly identity.

Alongside the development of individuals' understandings of what priesthood is or can be, and how it can be lived out, must run the beliefs and needs of the Church (both local and institutional) and people whom they serve. Bruce Reed's work on the dynamics of Christian faith and its expression has demonstrated that religious institutions may be held together by shared understandings, but that these constitutive ideas are never static; they are continually 'reinforced, repaired and updated.'[466] For priesthood to be both authentic and sustainable, it must be based upon the belief that the fundamental understandings that underpin that priesthood *and also underpin the expressed faith of the Church which allows and authorises it* are effective, powerful and culturally relevant.[467] This does not mean that Christianity or Christian priesthood are not based on deep and timeless concepts, but insists that the ideas which flesh out the way in which faith is practiced and understood at a particular time and place will necessarily be affected by context and situation. If priests do not have confidence that they are representing something meaningful and effective, then,

[466] Reed, 1978 pp.42-43
[467] Reed describes these understandings as 'myths and symbols.' Reed, 1978 p.172

says Reed, they can become plagued by doubt, become dependent on others or defensive of their position and authority, or misuse their position to serve themselves rather than the Church. The skills and gifts of priestly individuals are crucial, but so is the responsiveness of the institutional Church to the needs of the world. Uncertain and underperforming priests can be the sign of an institution which is uncertain of its role in a changing world.

Some curates coped well with the ambiguities they faced, thinking deeply about how their concepts of priesthood had changed throughout selection, training, and the first years of their curacy. Eleanor said this:

> Priesthood? It's fantastic. Priesthood is standing on the cusp of liminal theology, standing at the brink of things, between heaven and earth, or anointing someone with oil because you think they're about to die, and that's a huge moment. Or it's standing with someone when they tell you something that's secret and has never been told before, because the office that you hold is one of inviolable trust…Priesthood is interpretation, translation, interpreting the Gospel, translating the theology, making it physical, viral stuff, and it's also challenge, it's about challenging mediocrity, familiarity…and helping people see their own vision of Christ.

She held an ontological view of priesthood, believing that 'something transformational' happened at the moment of ordination, but also insisted that

the only way to begin to understand what priesthood was about was to experience it. 'It's only when you've done it yourself that you begin to get the concept.' Nick, conscious of the stresses existing between him and his incumbent, tried to analyse their understandings of priesthood. He believed that his incumbent thought that priesthood was 'all about service' and self-giving: 'we're here to pour ourselves out.' Nick however found that he was discovering that the practice of priesthood had changed his own theological understandings, and talked about a moment when school children, coming forward for a blessing, had to his surprise also prayed for him. 'I have a theory that ministry is not about doing, ministry is fundamentally a question of receiving, and the more I'm open to receive, then curiously enough, things start to roll…if we can be people who are open to receiving, it changes the world.'

Conclusions

At the beginning of this research project, I spoke to ordinands with immensely different ideas of what ministry involved, of how they saw themselves responding to God's calling, and of what they expected their futures as priests to be. They often had clear visions of where they expected to serve:

> I find it hard to imagine myself in a rural setting. I'd love to be in some sort of a city church, possibly with a multi-cultural sort of area, or possibly

> one where that could be combined with ministry to students, drawing on [mine and my wife's] experiences and loves,

and many had questions about their worthiness, their suitability and their calling: 'The question of whether I could do this with integrity was a very big thing for me, having seen lots of people who in my opinion maybe didn't do it with as much integrity as one would hope.' Some were excited and happy about being called to priesthood, others had been surprised, startled or depressed by the dawnings of a vocation, but they had all been persuaded by the discernment process, and in turn persuaded the Church that approved and sponsored their training, that they truly were called to be ordained ministers in the Church of England.

Travelling towards that first priestly post was not always straightforward, and there may have been unexpected distractions and diversions in the routes they took, but most found that exercising their priesthood was a challenging and fulfilling task. Learning to understand the historical and contextual factors in their parishes, coming to terms with their training incumbents' flaws (and their own), and appreciating the dynamic and mutually-associative nature of congregations was essential, and the experience of being a priest helped to shape theory into liveable practice. James had held reservations about his ability to fit into the childhood 'Father Ted' model of priesthood that he had grown up with, but had been reassured both by a Franciscan colleague and by

being a curate that 'there are so many priesthoods, so many things that they can be.' Sarah discovered that she was 'more resilient' than she had thought, and planned to be 'quite deliberate' about her next move. Margaret Harris has pointed out that congregations are interactive organisations, where ministers can empower the laity to exercise their essential voluntary roles, but where it is also necessary for the congregation to accept the leadership of their clergy and join in promoting the perceived purpose (in Anglican terms, the 'mission') of the Church. 'No congregation will survive very long,' she writes, 'unless it is able both to meet the needs of members *and* to be a credible 'witness' to proclaimed religious goals.'[468] Only those curates who began to grasp the need to combine sensitive leadership with shared ministry of *all* the people of God were able to flourish and grow, and these were largely the curates who had been given the opportunity to practice, to make mistakes, and to learn. Doing priestly things helped them to refine what priesthood could be for them.

Some participants in this study were coming to the end of their curacies and seeking their first incumbencies during the interview period. Nicola, aware of the fact that it 'can perhaps take ten shots [at application] to get a job' was offered the first incumbent post for which she applied, and was excited about the opportunities it seemed to offer. Some, whose curacies had not gone well, were moving to new places to do a second curacy, hoping that a better experience would give them firmer footings for their future ministries. Most had learned that

[468] Harris, 1998 p.187

being open to new possibilities could offer unexpected joy and fulfilment. Simon, having just obtained a specialist post, put it this way:

> I'm not where I expected to be, and I couldn't have predicted my next move either. [I expect my career to be mostly in] parish ministry, but I like having some outside portfolio interests to give it a bit of variety and perspective. The Bishop asked me outright a few months ago what I'd like to be doing in twenty years time; I said that I'd quite like to be a DDO one day, and I think that might be a good use of my gifts. But I don't have a back of the envelope plan – experience has taught me that God laughs in the face of human plans.

This growing acceptance that priesthood could be an adventure – a mystery tour instead of a perfectly planned route – was common to many of the curates who had settled into their roles as priests. 'When something comes along, I'll recognise it,' said Eleanor, and Deborah, planning to retire soon from her secular 'day job' said simply, 'God knows!'

Not all respondents believed that they would always be full-time paid clergy, although they expected to retain the essential nature of their priesthood for the rest of their lives. They realised that the Church was having to change in response to society,[469] and that what was currently seen as the dominant

[469] Woodhead and Heelas refer to modern social and cultural trends such as 'the elevation of the self; the triumph of the ideals of freedom and equality; the spread of democracy; the influence of

pattern of ministry, that of stipendiary parochial priesthood, might not be needed or sustainable in the future. James summed up the thoughts of many:

> I've come to the conclusion more and more that being an ordained minister in the Church of England is a human construct which we can use as we respond to what God's called us to do. I'm not sure that God actually calls people by saying 'you are to be a vicar in the Church of England, go and apply to your local DDO,' I don't think God is quite as narrow in that sort of way. I feel called into God's service, and I think that being an ordained person in the Church of England is a way in which my personality, gifts and talents can appropriately be used, but it doesn't feel like the be-all and end-all. If in five or ten years that's not the right thing to do, then I don't think that I would say, 'but my vocation was to Anglican priesthood.' I would [be different] in the sense of having been ordained a priest…I don't think the sense of being a priest will ever go away, but the sense of having to be a vicar, or a chaplain, or a rector, or a priest in charge, that sort of thing, feels much more open to negotiation.

James, and others too, looked at the map laid out in front of them, and saw many possibilities. The journey would carry on, but it might not involve the roads on which they had originally expected to travel.

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liberal education; the flight from deference, heteronomy and authority; the collapse of stable, hierarchical societies' as causing 'detraditionalisation' and change in religious organisations. Woodhead and Heelas, 2000 p.486

Conclusion

Transformation

Assumptions

The Church continues to need priests. There may be reassessment of the roles which those priests are expected to occupy, arguments about the essential nature and character of priesthood, and pragmatic responses to issues of funding and membership of local churches, but these are relatively minor details set against the requirement, within a sacramentally-focused and apostolically-ordered church, for ordained ministers. Yet the way in which the Church selects, trains and employs its priests has a significance that goes far beyond the quotidian, revealing assumptions about service, sacrifice and the nature of God's relationship with humanity (which includes priests as well as lay people). It is a theological as well as a practical issue.

I began this project because, as a newly-ordained member of the clergy, I was frustrated by the lack of authoritative literature about priesthood. I had responded to what I believed was God's calling; I had investigated the theoretical material that discussed the possibility (or otherwise) of that calling being extended to women as well as men; I had undergone a period of discernment, selection and theological education; hands had been laid upon me by my bishop, and I had been made first a deacon, then a priest. Yet although I

was able to function adequately within a parish, I was uncertain how what it was that I was doing related to the wider structures and expectations of the Church, and whether there was any clarity about what priesthood should mean to those who practice and experience it. This might have been considered in part to be due to institutional ambivalence to women's ordained ministry; a church that simultaneously agrees that women's ordination is possible *and* that it can be legitimately rejected by 'loyal Anglicans' sends mixed messages about the appropriateness of responding to a priestly vocation if you do not fit the traditional male model. However, it was also clear that this was not only an issue related to gender. Throughout training and in the early years of ministry, I discovered men, as well as women, who were also struggling with issues of identity and practice. Some were deeply damaged by the experience.

I quite deliberately chose to utilise techniques and theories informed by feminism when investigating the journeys of men and women to priesthood in the Church of England. Feminism is concerned above all with issues of justice, with challenging systems of oppression, and with understanding how lived realities affect the available possibilities and can inhibit the ways in which individuals and communities can flourish and grow. This is a deeply theological as well as a political task. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has pointed out that the insights of feminist theologies have 'universal validity'[470] and do not belong to one discrete group, but offer emancipatory possibilities for all people. The rigid divisions of 'traditional' academic thought encourage exclusivity and

[470] Fiorenza, 1999 p.10

fragmentation; something that Christian understandings, based upon a gospel that offers the possibility of redemption and acceptance for all, cannot uphold: humanity rather than 'otherness' must be our self-definition.[471] This is an unashamedly feminist and interdisciplinary piece of work, but it is concerned with the well-being of women and men alike.

Feminism insists that in order to investigate structures of oppression – by which I mean structures that inhibit flourishing by implicit assumptions as well as explicit actions – it is necessary to recognise the particularity of each standpoint and retain awareness of our partiality. However, it also suggests that the perspective of someone who stands outside a dominant group might, as an 'engaged vision,'[472] more easily allow identification of what lies beneath the social system in which both groups participate, allowing the development and implementation of transformative actions. This desire to bring about positive change I again identify as a theological imperative. Feminist studies have suggested that, as Adrienne Rich writes in her examination of motherhood, it is necessary to constantly remind ourselves that 'women are as intrinsically human as men.'[473] Within an understanding which believes that both men and women are created in the image of God, are valuable, and are offered redemption through Christ, it is vital that, in the words of Hans Küng, Christianity is not an

[471] I realise that for some members of the clergy, being set apart by ordination is fundamental to their self-understanding; they are ontologically changed by the work of the Holy Spirit, 'a priest forever.' I would argue, however, that this does not imply 'otherness' in the sense of losing their identity as fully human, created, like the whole of humanity, in the image of God.
[472] Nancy Hartsock, 'The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism' in Kemp and Squires, 1997 p.152
[473] Rich, 1992 p.xiii

abstract theoretical concept, but is 'experienced with the heart and also really lived out and put into practice.'[474] Rich's consideration of motherhood also raises an intriguing possibility. She recognises that motherhood is a fluid state of being, where mothers are 'institutionally involved in processes of change' that require the gradual relinquishment of control so that others may grow.[475] This insight, if applied to priesthood, suggests that those most opposed to the ordination of women, both those whose catholic understanding identifies the priest as 'Father' and those whose Evangelical interpretation of scripture demands male 'headship,' might be subconsciously resistant to the suggestion that ordained ministry might reflect a 'mothering' role. Priests have, like mothers and children, an ambiguous relationship with their congregations, combining nurturing and care with the desire to enable growth into maturity.[476] They sometimes dress in flowing, decorative robes, they offer pastoral care, and they invite the family of the church to come to the table and be fed. They are told confidences, they are involved with moments of transition from one life stage to another, and they often bear the responsibility for tasks which are uncongenial and sacrificial. There could be an underlying fear, in such an identification, not just of becoming 'womanly,' but also that women, through socialisation, experience or biology, might be more instinctively suited to such a role.

[474] Küng, 1999 p.797
[475] Nancy Hartsock, 'The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism' in Kemp and Squires, 1997 p.155
[476] The stories in this study of problematic relationships between priest and congregation often reflect situations where either the priest wants to maintain a controlling, parental role, or the congregation wishes to remain in childlike dependency.

Fiorenza, amongst other feminist thinkers, insists that privilege and exploitation are not related simply to issues of gender (at its most basic, the dualistic belief that we live in patriarchal societies where women are oppressed by men), but that there is a complex interplay between the multiplicity of structural systems within society: what she describes as 'the interaction between cultural-religious, economic, and political spheres of production.'[477] With this insight in mind, I assumed that each participant in this study would have a very particular and individual story to tell. Meaning could not be sought by placing their stories within an imposed framework, but by enabling them to give voice to their own journeys and understandings, in the hope that common themes would emerge which would be to the benefit of the Church and to those it ordains.

Discoveries

Most of them survived the journey. Of the initial research group of twenty ordinands and newly-ordained clergy, sixteen are still involved in some type of active ministry, although one person has moved from the Church of England to work in another part of the Anglican Communion. One person did not proceed to ordination, one has taken a break from ministry but may return at a later date, one has taken up secular employment but has Permission to Officiate[478] and only one of the group has left ministry and seems unlikely to work in any capacity for the Church in the future. On balance, when compared with statistics

[477] Fiorenza, 1999 p.13
[478] PTO gives an ordained minister the permission of the bishop to preach or conduct services on an occasional basis.

of those entering demanding secular careers, where a relatively high drop-out rate is considered normal, the process by which the Church of England selects, trains and oversees new priests seems to be fairly successful.

The stories told by each ordinand and priest, however, show that the situation is not that simple. The Church trains its ministers to be parochial clergy, and expects that the majority will spend all or most of their careers in parish ministry, but of this research group, four of the twenty have now taken up posts as chaplains (only one within an Anglican institution), and five have moved into a second curacy, predominantly as the result of an unsatisfactory experience in their first training parishes.[479] One person is engaged in church planting (establishing new congregations under the supervision of a local incumbent) and one is continuing a curacy beyond the expected period in order to oversee a parish in interregnum. Five years after research interviews began, only four of the group can be identified as incumbents or priests in charge of their own parishes. This is a startlingly small number.

It would be unrealistic to expect that the training process and the early years of ministry would be completely positive experiences, but the levels of stress experienced by a significant proportion of those involved in this study suggests that it is not only the job of being an ordained minister that creates difficulties,[480]

[479] Another individual is administratively classified as an 'assistant curate' but has a position of responsibility within a team ministry.
[480] Hoge points to successive studies showing that the breadth of tasks asked of Protestant clergy leads to 'overload' and that occupational stress is common to most ministers, although it

but that the very processes of the Church which are intended to underpin that ministry themselves place significant pressures upon ordinands and newly-ordained clergy. Instead of helping individuals become confident and competent priests, the early years of training and ministry can, in some cases, be such unhappy experiences that they threaten fatally to undermine the future calling. Some participants in this study might have been expected to reach positions of senior leadership, but were so damaged by their experiences of being curates that their own confidence in their abilities was gravely diminished and their trust in the Church was compromised. Only time will tell if they will eventually fulfil their early promise. Others, forced by the Church to gain experience in parish ministry despite knowing that this was not their calling, found their vocations to be sources of unremitting pain and disappointment rather than a joyful responding to God. And a few individuals, who had struggled to pass selection for ministerial training in order to become unhappy ordinands and even unhappier priests, faced uncertain futures and, in one case, complete breakdown.

Alongside the demands of the Church that trains and employs its clergy run the expectations and assumptions of a world in which religious faith is an increasingly contested concept, and where clergy no longer expect to have a valued status and respected identity in their community. Ordained ministry in the Church of England is always corporate rather than individualistic; it is

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can decrease with age. One wonders if this reduction in stress is due to greater experience, or to the fact that rapidly approaching retirement offers an escape route! Dean R Hoge, 'The Sociology of the Clergy' in Clarke, 2011 pp. 582, 583.

exercised *for* God, *through* the Church and *in response* to the needs of society. Although expressing eternal truths, it must reflect the rapidly-changing nature of the context in which it is practised. Ordained ministers are not alone in living in difficult times – many professionals, particularly those in the public eye, express confusion about what it is that they should be doing, and what is expected of them – but they are unusual in that alongside the sacrificial, vocational nature of their role runs a particular vulnerability to uncertainties in society. Sociologist David Bromley, for example, has pointed out the way in which the influence and inherent meaning of established religions can be diminished at times when society itself is unstable or in crisis;[481] the Church, particularly when it is seen to represent the Establishment, can be made the scapegoat for unresolved matters of identity, meaning and cohesion. Its ministers can find themselves being forced to carry the unresolved issues of the world as well as their own uncertainties. Cognitive dissonance theory suggests that the magnitude of dissonance experienced by individuals is directly related to the importance or value attached to the two dissonant elements; clergy, who are expected to be *in* the world but not *of* it, are particularly vulnerable to the almost unbearable tensions that result. The strategies that Festinger identifies as effective when faced with dissonance (changing one's opinion, changing the opinions of others, or rejecting people who disagree)[482] are, in the main, inappropriate for those vowed to ordained ministry, and if clergy do not have sources of social support (another important strategic response to dissonance), they can find their

[481] David G Bromley, 'New Religions as a Specialist Field of Study' in Clarke, 2011 p.725
[482] Festinger, 2001 p.265

situation unbearable. Extreme psychological discomfort, or an active avoidance of people, information or situations which increase the dissonance, are likely to result. Neither response is good for the individual concerned or for the Church.

David Martin, echoing Bruce Reed, has written that the survival of Christianity depends on whether 'the Christian drama continues to make sense.'[483] It seems that to many newly-ordained priests, the model of parish ministry with which they are presented and for which they are selected and trained simply does not make sense. Studies have pointed out that the development of clergy and the church they serve owes much to the 'myths and histories' which shape and form understandings and expectations.[484] Clergy know, at heart, that the idealised visions of priesthood that carried them forward into ministry are not realistic, but faced with rapid change within Church and society, struggling with issues of identity and alienation, believing themselves to be marginalised whilst longing for the affirmation of a supportive community, they have little to supplant those idealised images. Along with others of professional status, they recognise conflict between their work and their worth, but constant redefining of their role and the context in which it is practiced leaves them looking over their shoulders to a golden age of ministerial certainty (which probably never existed), whilst facing very different and unstable realities.[485] As a result, they either struggle to reconcile their vocations with the understandings and demands placed upon

[483] Martin, 2011 p.43
[484] Percy, 2006 p.68
[485] Jackson points out the move from classical Marxist analysis of oppression as systematic and based upon structural inequalities to Foucalt's reconceptualisation of power as 'diffuse and dispersed.' Stevi Jackson, 'Feminist Social Theory' in Jackson and Jones, 1998 pp.13, 22

them both by the Church and the laity they serve, causing practical and psychological difficulties in inhabiting the role of parish priest, or they seek to express their calling to serve God in other settings such as hospital chaplaincy, where boundaries are firm and expectations clear. As research interviews demonstrated, the pain caused by a bad 'fit' between individual and role (in training and after ordination) can cause immense pain and distress. It can cause lasting damage to clergy, to parishioners, and to the reputation of the Church. And it reflects badly on the God who calls men and women into service. 'The Church gets the ministry it asks for (and deserves),' said Michael Sadgrove, describing institutional uncertainties about ordained ministry as 'a key theological and missiological failure.' [486] Such institutional failure comes at immense cost.

Available research into priestly ministries, as described in chapter 1 of this study, most commonly takes a snapshot of situations at a particular moment in time and draws conclusions from the evidence this provides, or it looks back from a secure standpoint and reinterprets the history of what occurred in order for that point to be reached. Longitudinal studies of this type, which follow the development of identity and practice over a sustained period of time, asking questions of participants at regular intervals, are very rare. This is, I believe, a significant gap in research literature. The employment of the metaphor of a *journey* to priesthood reflects what I consider to be most crucial in understanding how priestly ministries are formed and shaped; this is a continual and continuing

[486] Sadgrove, 2008 p.11

process, influenced not only by the desires and hopes of the institution and its representatives, but also by a multiplicity of less manageable factors: individuals' histories and expectations, people and places encountered along the way, critical incidents, decisions and theological understandings. Clergy, says Percy, are always 'work in progress.'[487] I quoted at the beginning of this study, Wesley Carr's 'basic part of the minister's question: 'What is happening to me? And why?''[488] The Church might hope that by careful selection and training, its ordinands have a good chance of becoming competent priests ready to serve the needs of diverse communities, but it fails to recognise that this question of 'what and why' (to which I would add, 'and who am I as a result?') is one that will be asked continually throughout ministry. If priests are not equipped with the personal, theological and practical resources to find acceptable answers to this question, they will always find their ministries to be a struggle rather than a joy.

Congregations and contexts

There is an underlying uneasiness in contemporary priestly ministry that reflects societal ambivalence towards institutions and their role in public life. The Church of England, in considering itself to be both Catholic and Reformed, attempts to reconcile the tension between a hierarchical, episcopally-led system which privileges the priestly caste (where the most significant tasks are identified

[487] Percy, 2006 p.176
[488] Percy and Lowe, 2004 p.196

as sacramental and reserved to ordained clergy) and the Lutheran concept of the priesthood of all believers (which suggests that clergy are not so much 'set apart' as specially tasked). It adds to this the dubious benefit of Establishment; whether or not the Church of England can be considered to be the authentic spiritual face of the nation (if it ever was), it is Anglican practice and liturgy that crowns British royalty, shapes State funerals and underpins annual commemorations of those killed in war, and it is the assumption that the Church will care for *all* those within its self-determined geographical boundaries that sustains the parish system. Church of England bishops sit at the heart of government, and changes to Church governance and order must be approved by Parliament and pass into English law. Church and State are intimately entwined, and despite the increased attention given to multiculturalism, other faiths and secularist expression, it is still to the Church of England that the nation turns at times of crisis or shock, as typified by the aftermath of events as diverse as the death of the Princess of Wales and the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers.

The reality for priests engaged in ministry at a local level (and for bishops attempting to lead the Church) is, of course, not so simple. Bruce Reed has pointed out that institutions rely for their survival upon shared ideas, ideals and concepts, and that these have to be continually shaped and reinforced to retain their power and efficacy.[489] The Church of England may still have a privileged position within the nation – although this cannot be taken for granted and might

[489] Reed, 1978 p.43

well reflect the cultural position of 'dominant' social groups[490] rather than the country as a whole, but it cannot assume that this position will continue, or that it will be accepted even by its own membership. Recent worldwide reactions to the proposed 'Anglican Covenant' has shown that the concept of the Archbishop of Canterbury as 'first among equals' and thereby as *de facto* 'head' of worldwide Anglicanism is no longer taken for granted even within the Church of England, let alone elsewhere. Lacking the authority of Papal Magisterium demonstrated by Roman Catholicism, but resistant to the individualistic nature of congregational churches, the Church of England is faced with the prospect of continuing as it is (which might result in stagnation or cultural irrelevance), of becoming more prescriptive (which could result in institutional schism), or of accepting the prospect of the development of Anglicanism as a loose federation of churches, bound by affection, shared history and a common faith expressed in the words of the Creed. Diversity and difference would be accommodated, if not always understood, and the pre-eminence of the Church of England set aside as a thing of the past. Proponents of such pragmatism argue that it is not only a model that is Biblically coherent and God-given, but also an 'underrated theological opportunity' to reflect on the meaning of identity, to value reform and to consider links between Church, culture and community.[491]

Yet if change is unsettling, uncertainty is even more so. If the Church of England has to spend energy defending itself against what Linda Woodhead has

[490] Turner, 1991 p.201
[491] Percy, 2010 pp.174-175

described as the 'counter-ideology' of secularism,[492] whilst wondering if it will hold together in the face of increasingly bitter arguments over issues such as homosexuality and female episcopacy, then both its leaders and its parish clergy can find themselves exhausted rather than energised by their calling. It is all very well for handbooks on vocation to insist that the priestly vocation must be 'integrated' into the minister's life,[493] but if what is explicit about that vocation is consistently challenged, whilst the implicit seems to be unrealistic or unachievable, then there is little left to assimilate. Again, this might always have been so: Justin Welby, the Bishop of Durham was recently quoted as saying that the Church of England never has been 'an organisation in any recognisable sense' and that the authority of its leadership has always been, in part, 'illusion' bolstered by 'funny hats and special sticks',[494] but the contemporary situation places clergy in an unusually challenging position. Hoge identifies as significant an increasing lack of deference towards clergy, higher expectations from a more educated laity, the impact of globalisation and the associated breakdown of barriers between denominations and faiths, and the growth of networks rather than hierarchies.[495] Clergy who are well-established in their profession may be able to cope with shifting sands beneath their feet; ordinands and the newly-ordained, particularly those who retain a naïve or idealistic view of their faith and their calling, may find that this is, in Hunter's words, 'fatal.'[496]

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[492] Woodhead and Catto, 2012 p.4
[493] Buchanan, 2008 p.ix
[494] Andrew Brown, 'The Church of England needs its own rebirth' in *The Guardian*, 6 April 2012, at http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/apr/06/church-england-own-rebirth-easter accessed 6 April 2012
[495] Dean R Hoge, 'The Sociology of the Clergy' in Clarke, 2011 pp.592-594
[496] Hunter, 2010, p.27

Proposals and practice

Studies into the process of undertaking research, particularly when it is based closely upon the lives and understandings of a group of people with whom the researcher can identify, show that all those participating can be affected by the process. Denise Ackermann has written that story-telling increases awareness of the 'other' and of the self:

> We do not only hear the stories of others. We have our own stories to tell. As those stories intersect, they change and we too are changed.[497]

Ethical protocols in this project ensured that each respondent interviewed was given the opportunity to talk about their experiences of taking part in the project as well as their thoughts about ministry, and was able to make contact at any time to discuss more considered responses to the issues raised at interview. But as a researcher, bound by confidentiality as well as by the imperative not to consciously shape or influence the responses of those taking part in the project, I found that I was often listening to material that resonated deeply with my own experience, or which was immensely painful to hear, without having the opportunity to share this with others. In some ways, this reflects the daily practice of those ordained priest and bound by the seal of the confessional. What is confessed is to be shared only with God through prayer, and indeed

[497] D Ackermann, 'A Voice Was Heard in Ramah' in Ackermann and Bons-Storm, 1998 pp.94-95

there were many times when after interview I was driven to pray for the people involved and the situations they faced. The process of reflexive consideration and analysis of the material gathered, and writing it into a coherent whole, was also a way of sharing and considering its impact.

I also had to accept that my understandings of my own priesthood, and my relationship with the Church, was being influenced by the research process. I believe now that priesthood is as much about the decision to align one's life with God as it is with doing particular tasks in a particular way.[498] I do, however, feel strongly that the Church, which asks its priests to *do* as well as to *be*, must reassess the way in which it selects, trains, uses and supports its clergy. We might well be suspicious of overarching theories,[499] and argue about catholicity, authority and ministry, but the Church of England, through its diocesan structures, is employer as well as the inheritor of tradition. Recent changes bringing clergy more in line with secular employment legislation has emphasised this. Relatively minor changes have the prospect of creating better conditions in which ordinands, curates and their training incumbents are able to investigate what it is that priesthood (at a particular time and in a particular place) means, and how it is to be nurtured, and closer attention to theories that address issues of identity and understanding, can help to develop strategic responses to the

[498] A recent report on House for Duty ministry affirms this by saying simply that priesthood is being 'set free to spend some time in prayer and the service of God and others.' *House for Duty Guidance*, Archbishop's Council, 2012 p.27

[499] David Martin argues however that 'master narratives' are as present as ever in society, and that theories of secularisation themselves form metanarratives. Martin, 2011 pp.8, 25

uncertainties of practising priesthood in rapidly-changing contexts.[500] The following proposals offer suggestions for improved practice that could benefit clergy and Church alike.

Literature and priestly identities

Existing literature on priesthood proves inadequate to shape priestly identities that are appropriate for the twenty-first century Church of England. The Church should be prepared to be explicit about its theology of priesthood and about what it expects from its ordained ministers. It needs to speak with clarity about the variety of expressions of priesthood that are possible today, and open about what it believes that it is training its priests to be and to do. Those exploring vocation, and ordinands in training, should be guided towards theological texts that challenge and expand their own perceptions of priestly being and which could sustain their faith and practice in times of difficulty.

Academic tools and understandings

Emphasis placed during training on 'classic' and historic knowledge means that the most recent academic research is often regarded as optional or irrelevant. If Christianity is to address issues of exclusion, power, marginalisation and authority (which lie at the heart of the Christian tradition), it is vital to teach

[500] For example, Marxist attention to the 'lived relations of domination' (Haraway, 1991 p.152) and the feminist re-articulation of 'productivity' as 'contribution to the common good' rather than in purely monetary terms (Jones, 2000 p.86)

awareness of current academic thought in a wide range of disciplines. Interdisciplinary study in subjects such as politics, sociology, technology and sexuality would enable clergy to speak convincingly to those outside the tradition as well as to their own membership.

Gender, theory and practice

Feminist and gender theory tends to be viewed with suspicion by the Church and its representatives, and does not routinely form part of ministerial training in the UK. Issues related to gender and sexuality are, however, likely to remain fundamental to worldwide Anglicanism and are currently proving to be divisive topics of debate in the Church of England. Without the academic and personal tools to address these matters, clergy – both male and female – will remain at a disadvantage in dealing with questions about faith, practice, authority, and power within the institution. Gender issues matter, for men and women, and the academic study of gender and feminist theory and theology should form part of initial and continuing ministerial training.

Abilities and possibilities

Christianity's focus on vocation, the supernatural calling of God, contrasts with the emphasis in other faiths (such as Judaism) on whether this is the best use of individuals' skills and gifts. The Church boasts that its annual recommendation

rate has been 'remarkably consistent' over the last five years, standing at about 80%[501], a very high figure. The majority of clergy posts are parish-based, and so all ordinands, even those who are explicit that they do not feel called to be parish priests, are trained for this type of ministry and placed in traditional curacies. The Church should be explicit about what it is selecting its clergy for, and if this is expected to be parish ministry, that needs to be spelled out to applicants and selectors alike. Clergy may discover in the future that they are called to different vocational expressions, such as chaplaincy,[502] but should assume that the foundation of their ministry is parochial priesthood and that this is the basis on which they will be selected and trained.

Valuing the people of God

Several respondents to this study admitted that their calling was not specifically to priesthood, but believed that in order for them to have the personal authority or institutional permission to exercise ministries of teaching or leadership, they needed to be ordained. This not only placed some of them in positions where the divergence between their vocation and their experience caused deep discomfort or distress, but is also at odds with church teaching of the ministry of the whole people of God, and the Church of England's policy of increasingly relying upon the participation of the laity. The Church should not imply that the

[501] http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1301976/questions%20fri%208%20jul%2011.pdf accessed 2 August 2011

[502] It is arguable whether most chaplains (in settings other than large hospitals) need to be ordained at all. Occasional sacramental duties could be easily carried out by arrangement with local priests, leaving chaplains free to concentrate on their other roles.

ultimate expression of vocation is priesthood, but should recognise that the gifts of some individuals may be best used in other ways. Ordained clergy should be encouraged to share leadership and responsibility with lay workers (if appropriate, trained and authorised by the Church) and with their parishioners, who often demonstrate high-level abilities and skills in their secular employment. The Church must be seen to practice what it preaches.

Experience and role models

Not all candidates for ministry are confident in obtaining appropriate experience in church settings and in preparing for a BAP. Gender issues, family circumstances and theological understandings can affect the opportunities open to them and the way in which they interpret and explain their vocation and their gifts. DDOs and selection panels should be ready to recognise gaps in practice and understanding, directing candidates to appropriate mentors who can expand their vision of ordained ministry, and should look for transferable skills as well as church-based experience.

Training preferences

The choice of training route and institution can be based on false assumptions, lack of experience of different theological or ministerial expressions, family circumstances, diocesan practice and geographical locations. Choices about

where and how to train for ministry need to be made with the support and guidance of the DDO in order to obtain the best result for both the candidate and the Church; the decision should not be left purely to the (sometimes naive) preference of the candidate or forced by financial issues. The cost of training is significant, but the cost, in fiscal, institutional and personal terms, of a failed ministry is immense.

Sustained encounter

Theoretical study has little effect on idealistic views of priesthood, but extended practical experience, in the form of midweek or summer placements during training, can be hugely significant. Students who are given real responsibilities in their placements, and are supervised with care, often flourish, but ordinands on part-time local courses are routinely placed in the sending parishes to which they expect to return after ordination. The experience gained in practical placements is invaluable and should be offered to all ordinands, including those training locally for non-stipendiary ministry.

Acknowledging difficulties

The experience of training can be painful and distressing and problems can occasionally be so severe that they require specialist intervention. Colleges or supervising staff seem reluctant to advise medical or psychological support, and

ordinands can feel that asking for external help demonstrates a lack of prayerful faith. Ordinands need the theological, spiritual and Biblical tools to address disappointment and apparent failure, and to be reassured that as in all professions, the path is not always smooth. Medical help should be sought where it seems necessary, without any implication that this might negatively affect future ministry.

Parish and context

Ordinands generally assume that their diocese has their best interests at heart and that their bishops know best when selecting training parishes. Candidates with very specific requirements sometimes turn down title posts until they find something more congenial, but most feel pressured by obedience and pragmatism into accepting what is offered. In some cases this leads to failure of the curacy and extreme distress for all involved. Dioceses should make it clear to ordinands that although they try to make the best match possible, they are influenced by other factors than individual need and that it is perfectly acceptable to ask to look again. They should be honest about the history of the parish and its imperfections and need to ensure that those responsible for training curates are properly trained and supervised. It is helpful for curates to have links with other parishes and with experienced clergy, where they can gain experience that might not be available in their training parish, seek advice or support if relationships begin to flounder, and begin to understand the

importance of context to ministry. It is recommended that curates are given a mentor outside their training parish. Parishioners expect their clergy to demonstrate professionalism, particularly when taking weddings, funerals and baptisms, and to be competent in practical tasks such as keeping records and chairing meetings**.** Hard skills training should be provided and assessed by the diocese as well as within the parish.

Ordination and beginnings

Most ordinands struggle to understand why they are to be ordained first as deacons, when they are called to priesthood. They view it as merely a transitional ministry, and are frustrated not to be made priests straight away. Experience of the diaconate, however, is often invaluable when viewed in retrospect. Training institutions should teach a clear theology of the diaconate, emphasising its validity as a ministry in its own right, and making clear the value of the diaconal year.

Lifestyles and livelihoods

Curates and their training incumbents need to develop ways of setting boundaries on their professional and private lives, developing appropriate relationships and modelling sustainable working practices and patterns. Mutual respect is crucial and both curate and incumbent should be prepared to learn

from each other. Support groups offering informal opportunities to share experiences and seek advice from trusted colleagues can be of great value; deanery chapters do not seem to operate at this level and problems can be compounded if they are never shared. Dioceses should facilitate the development of separate support groups for their curates and for their training incumbents. It might be necessary to make such groups compulsory parts of the training experience in order to ensure that those most in need receive adequate opportunities for support. Clergy families can feel unsure about the role they play in the parish, their visibility in the community and the expectations that are placed upon them. Training sessions, sources of support or advice, and social events should be offered to clergy families, but it is important that they do not feel pressured to take up these opportunities or believe that they will be criticised for lack of involvement.

Mapping the journey

The prospect of transformation – of lives, of vocations, of expectations and of identities – drew the participants in this study onto a journey towards priesthood and beyond. Some began travelling with a clear vision of where they expected to go and what they believed that they would experience as they progressed through unfamiliar territory; they had mentally planned their route and packed for the journey. Some stepped off with little idea of where they were heading and few resources, other than trust, to sustain them. Some had been keen to get

started whilst others had dragged their heels, reluctant and unsure. They had hoped, in the main, that this would be a positive process, and although this was not so for all, all were changed by their travels. Their journeys continue.

What is most significant, it seems, is not those places reached or points visited, but the *willingness* to set out in faith, responsive to God's call and with only the sketchiest idea of what might transpire along the way. Biblical history is, after all, littered with accounts of journeys which were undertaken in difficult circumstances and which led to unexpected destinations, from Noah's launching of the ark upon the flood, via Moses' wanderings in the desert, to Jesus' long walk from Gethsemane to the Cross. It is God's Church that we hope to serve, to the benefit of God's people, and we must trust that God will be present in all our journeying. The experiences of the people who took part in this project demonstrate that certainty will almost always be challenged, that responses to the unexpected can lead to remarkable discoveries, and that exploration, rather than a defined destination, can be of benefit to individual, community and Church alike. It is what is recognised along the way that can be of greatest significance, enabling identification of the particular local factors and peculiarities that will affect how the landscape can be inhabited. The ability to read the landscape, the personal, spiritual and academic resources to undertake the journey, and the knowledge that it can, despite all, be a truly Godly experience, may be reliant upon grace, but should be supported by the Church.

We need to hold onto faith that God will accompany us as we map the journey, but we should also be able to expect that the Church will equip us to travel well.

Rabbi Barbara Borts, looking at God's self-description in Exodus 3:14, translates *ehyhe asher ehyeh* not as 'I am what I am,' but as 'I will be what I will be.'[503] That sense of unbounded possibility with and through God should lie at the heart of ordained ministry, and the Church has the chance to make it so.

[503] Barbara Borts, 'Repairing the World – A Task for Jews?' in Romain, 1996 p.201

Annexe A

Dear

I am carrying out postgraduate study into experiences of priesthood in the Church of England, with specific focus upon how personal understandings of priesthood by the ordained (or those preparing for ordination) relate to the way in which they are viewed by others. The research project is being supervised through Kings College London by Reverend Canon Professor Martyn Percy.

I am conducting interviews with ordinands and recently ordained priests and deacons, as well as with people exploring their vocation to ordained ministry. Material gathered during interview will be treated as confidential and any identifying details will be removed before it is used in the final research report.

I would like to invite you to participate in this project by taking part in an interview lasting for about one hour. The interview will be arranged at a time and place convenient for you, you are free to refuse to answer any questions, and you may withdraw from the project at any time. After the interview, at which no-one else will be present, you will be sent a transcript so that you can correct any errors or make further points.

If you would like to talk to me about any aspects of this project, or if you would like further information, please do not hesitate to get in touch. My contact details are at the top of this sheet. If you are able to take part, I would be grateful if you could contact me by e-mail at the address above, or complete the tear-off form at the bottom of the sheet and return it to me. Thank you.

Amanda Bloor

Name: _____ *(please print)*

I am willing to take part in this research project. The best time for me to be interviewed is:

(delete as appropriate)

Day: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday

Time: morning, afternoon, evening

I would prefer you to contact me by:

e-mail, telephone, post

at: _____

to arrange an interview time and date.

Annexe B

Research Questions – Ordinands: First interview

Tell me a little bit about yourself.

Do you have a partner / children?

How did you recognise your vocation?

Was it always to priesthood? What did you understand by priesthood at that stage?

What did you feel about your vocation?

What was the reaction of family and friends? How did you feel then?

How do you feel about your vocation now, after time in training?

How do family and friends feel about your vocation now, after time in training?

Why did you choose this particular training course / institution?

Has training been what you expected? What has been good? What has been difficult / unhelpful?

What personal qualities and life experience do you have that will help your priesthood?

What do you expect to find difficult?

What will it be like, being a priest?

What sort of a parish do you expect / hope to do your curacy in? Why?

What do you hope for from your training incumbent?

What aspects of priestly ministry do you expect / hope to develop during your curacy?

What do you expect / hope to do after your curacy? Why?

For you, what *is* priesthood?

Where is God in all this?

Is there anything else you want to say?

Research Questions – Ordinands: Second interview

Tell me where you are at the moment

How does it feel?

Looking back on the last year, what stands out? What was important?

What are your priorities for the year ahead? Why?

How do you feel about your vocation now?

What do you feel about the theological training you've received so far?

What has been good?

What has been difficult?

How do you feel about being ordained?

Will you wear a clerical collar? Why? How will that feel?

How do you feel about being a representative of the Church as institution?

What are you excited about?

What are you worried about?

What do you think the priorities of a priest should be?

What do you think that the parish will ask of you?

What do you think you might do after your curacy?

How are friends and family reacting to your future as an ordained minister?

Last time we spoke you talked about…

has that been resolved now?

What is the year ahead going to be like?

Where is God in all this?

Is there anything else you want to say?

Research Questions – Deacons

Tell me where you are at the moment (ministerially and personally). How does it feel?

How do you feel about your vocation now, after ordination as deacon and time in a parish?

How do family and friends feel about your vocation now?

What made you accept this parish?

Has the parish been what you expected? What has been good? What has been difficult / unhelpful?

Do you wear a clerical collar? How does that feel?

How well do you think your theological training prepared you for ministry? What was well done? What could have been done better, and how?

What personal qualities or life experience do you have that are helping your ministry?

What are your priorities for the year ahead?

What are you finding difficult?

How is your relationship with your training incumbent? How significant is that?

What's been the most significant thing that happened during the last year?

What will be different when you are ordained priest?

What factors are affecting what you are able to do as curate?

What aspects of priestly ministry do you expect / hope to develop during your curacy?

What do you expect / hope to do after your curacy? Why?

What support / help are you getting from your Diocese?

Do you have other support systems – a cell group, spiritual director etc?

What are your priorities at the moment (in ministry and your personal life)?

Do you manage to take a day off?

For you, what *is* priesthood?

Has that understanding altered at all since you first explored ordination?

Where is God in all this?

Is there anything else that you'd like to mention?

Research Questions – Priests

Tell me a little bit about yourself. (Married? Children? Age group?)

Where did you do your theological training? Why?

Was training a good experience?

How do you feel about your vocation now, after parish experience?

How do family and friends feel about your vocation now?

What made you accept this parish?

Has the parish been what you expected? What has been good? What has been difficult / unhelpful?

Do you wear a clerical collar? How does that feel?

How well do you feel your theological training prepared you for ministry? What was well done? What could have been better and how?

What personal qualities / life experience do you have that are helping your ministry?

What are you finding difficult?

What difference has it made to be priested?

How is your relationship with your training incumbent? How significant has that been?

What factors are affecting what you are able to do as curate?

What do you expect / hope to do after your curacy? Why?

What support / help are you getting from your Diocese? Do you have other support systems?

What are your priorities at the moment (in ministry and in your personal life)?

For you, what *is* priesthood?

Has that understanding altered at all since you first explored ordination?

Where is God in all this?

Is there anything else that you'd like to mention?

Annexe C

Informed Consent Form

To be read out by researcher before the beginning of the interview; one copy to be kept by the respondent and one copy to be signed by the respondent and kept by the researcher.

My name is Amanda Bloor. I am an ordained priest in the Diocese of Oxford, and I am conducting research into understandings and experiences of priesthood in the Church of England. The research project is being supervised through Kings College London by Reverend Canon Professor Martyn Percy.
I can be contacted at …… telephone number …… e-mail …… should you have any questions.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this project. I would like to emphasise that:

- your participation is entirely voluntary
- you are free to withdraw from the project at any time
- you are free to refuse to answer any questions
- a transcript of this interview will be sent to you so that you can correct any errors or make further points

The interview will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to members of the research project. It may be quoted in whole or in part in the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or any identifying characteristics be included.

Please sign this form to show that I have read the contents to you and that you give consent to use of interview material in the final research report.

_____ (signed)

_____ (printed)

_____ (date)

Address to which transcripts should be sent:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Researcher to keep signed copy and leave unsigned copy with respondent

Annexe D

Sample section of interview transcript

Interview *date*

Age bracket and sex of interviewee
Type of course (full time/part time/mixed mode)

Tell me what's going on with you? It hasn't been long since your ordination.

No it hasn't, although it feels like a long time, it's only a month
Fine, you know
it's
it's just felt kind of reasonably normal
I mean for some people it's felt
some people have said, oh, it feels different

um

but for me it hasn't really felt – it's just felt, you know, part of a continuous movement rather than having felt like a very big change

um

I'm not doing huge amounts, obviously, because I'm still working full-time and it's very demanding
so at the moment I'm doing
I'm committing myself to preaching once a month, I'm leading a service once a month
and then doing
but being there most weeks
I don't do 8 o'clock on Sunday
there isn't – I mean it's a small congregation, until I'm priested there isn't – it's not a help really to have me there, but when I'm priested it might make a difference and I might decide to do some of those
but
but I'm there the main mornings, and we have evensong so
and then I'm sort of offering to do bits the other times, so I might do intercessions
although the morning service we have a rota of people who do intercessions
there are little bits of helping out
I'm not doing much other than that to be honest
I'm not doing much – well daytime is impossible
we've just started up a

the word has gone completely out of my head!
a sort of group – a pastoral team, that's the word I'm looking for, a group of people who will go and see people, which we haven't ever had before, and I'm out – I'm being part of that team, and trying to support it, without committing myself to regularly going visiting people, because to be honest there's not that much time at the moment
I will try and do a bit of visiting when it's sort of holiday time and I'm not so busy at work, but we haven't had that since

yes

(pause)

How do you feel about your vocation now, after being ordained?

it was – I mean it was interesting at work, I spoke to - we've got a new boss, who started on the 1st of September, and I spoke to her and -
milling around and things, and I just said that she might be interested to know that I was being ordained and it was the beginning of October, because the old boss had known, and I thought it was a bit of information, you know, that she should
and she was very interested in it and so asked such good questions
that I said, you know, you'd be very welcome to come if you'd like to, because I knew I had a couple of spare tickets
she said, well let me know the dates, and I sent her an invitation, and she said that she could

and

(pause)

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